FORBIDDEN TO MARRY

By
MRS. G. LINNÆUS
BANKS

Annie Wilkinson

New Year 1885

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FORBIDDEN TO MARRY.

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS,

AUTHORESS OF "GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE;" "THE MANCHESTER MAN;" "GLORY," &c., &c.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FORBIDDEN TO MARRY.

CHAPTER I.

EXPLANATIONS.

THOUGH even in the days of the Romans Buxton was a health resort, and though it now flourishes amid foliage and verdure, one of the gems of the earth, it was a small, dreary town in a wide hollow amongst bleak and barren moorlands, in the last century. Drives, hanging woods, picturesque gardens were not. Hucksters brought provisions into the town: there was not even a market to diversify the scene. The area within the noble Crescent—which crescent a recent enthusiast has dubbed "a symphony in stone"—the semi-Gothic temple sheltering the wondrous springs, hot and cold from the

same rock; the "Stanecliff" above those wells, where patients tested their own strength; the polygonic Stables, with their inner circus for equestrian exercise; the Old Hall and its garden; the spar and curiosity shops under the colonnade; the baths; the one reading and coffee room; the one circulating library; the one ancient little church—were all confined within a limited space, and visitors in quest of the picturesque glories of the Peak had to ramble farther afield, and mostly on foot.

It had certainly an assembly-room in the principal hotel, and a theatre like a barn, where during the season performances might be enjoyed three times a week; but otherwise it had few compensations within itself for those who wanted neither to drink the waters nor to bathe in them.

Sir Madoc did both in order to keep incipient gout at bay, yet even he had to seek the solace of his snuff-box and the card-room; but Pauline would have been desperate had not Sir Jenkyn followed in

their wake, and been at hand to ride, or drive, or promenade and flirt with, or to arrange parties for visiting the wonders of the Peak. He, however, was an amazingly companionable fellow, drew people together without difficulty, had a spice of adventure and enthusiasm, and by the time Muriel encountered Arthur, had thrown the latter considerably into the shade.

Not that the lieutenant raised any objection, he seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise; gave his invalid mother no cause to complain of inattention, and professing no ardour for exploration, whenever horses and vehicles had to be abandoned for the inspection of "Hole," or "Cavern," or "Tor," and there was climbing or scrambling to be done, where a masculine hand or foot might be called to the aid of a feminine, he was given to lag behind and leave a clear field to his rival. And as their infirmities detained Sir Madoc and his sister-in-law in the waiting carriages at a distance the natural readjustment passed unobserved. It was a natural

readjustment; the dash of assertive independence in Pauline, and her spirit of daring—so distasteful to Arthur, had a wonderful charm for Sir Jenkyn, the most reckless of riders, the boldest of mountaineers.

Arthur Wynne himself, tied as he was pretty much to a querulous invalid's side, did not find Buxton attractive; even sympathy with his mother's condition was so modified by a knowledge of its cause, that he began to find his attendance irksome, and to long for a return to his duties, and freedom.

"I shall be glad to escape from this confoundedly dull place. It is enough to give a man the horrors to encounter only suffering in his walks; to have nothing brighter to look out upon than a barren hill, and the gossipping invalids round St. Ann's Well," had been his hasty comment in the ear of Sir Madoc that sunny morning in August, which Muriel had found so sultry in the stage-coach.

"I say, that's not complimentary to

Pauline," had been flung after him, as with a "Can't help it," and a stifled yawn the young fellow had left his uncle to the solace of his snuff-box, in the hands of Norris, who numbered shaving and hairdressing among his various duties, and was much more ready to serve the hearty if hasty old gentleman, than to attend his exacting mistress.

What a transformation a few hours had effected. If the "place" had suddenly blossomed like a rose, Arthur Wynne could not have felt more exhilarated, or more buoyantly have ascended the stairs to that spacious drawing-room in the Crescent where his mother, seated by a window, looked drearily out on the Stanecliff, in all its bareness and sterility, where nothing grew but a few sparse bushes and gorse, and where nothing had then been planted but post and rails to mark boundaries where feet might tread, or to assist them up the ascent, and where occupied seats suggested how wearisome that ascent might be.

Wearisome enough must the prospect have

been to Mrs. Wynne, who could take no part in Buxton's few amusements. It was much as if a brilliant butterfly with its wings crushed and torn lay gasping on a wall whilst the sunshine lit a host of fluttering wings that flitted by unheeding. She had languished and courted admiration at her last ball;—she "would not consent to take her place with antiquated spinsters and dowagers at the card-table." When not driving out, or at the bath, or taking the water at St. Ann's Wells, her only refuge and resource was the window. There, in a wheeled chair, luxuriously cushioned to ease her contracted limbs, she sat in rich attire, her hands, no longer slender and jewelled, lying cramped and idly in her lap, her weary eyes discontentedly watching the people passing to and fro, or climbing with slow steps the barren hill before her, or crowding round the Gothic temple which enshrined the waters of Hygeia, as they gushed from the limestone into marble basins, offering health to all who drank.

She was so seated, and alone, miserably

bewailing her lot, when her son entered with a free, firm step the apartment over the colonnade. It was draped and fitted with the sombre and heavy taste of the period, a chimney-glass and circular mirror with candelabra alone giving lightness to the soberly painted walls.

Turning her head slightly she said pettishly, "Where have you been all this while, Arthur? It was cruel to leave me to the mercy of those horrid chairmen."

"Owen was with you, madam," answered he with deference.

"Owen indeed! As if Owen could be expected to take the place of my son! And even Owen neglects me now my own kith and kin desert me."

"I am sorry, my dear mother, you should think me remiss. I concluded Pauline would be here with you."

"With me indeed!" she jerked out. "She is off with that odious Sir Jenkyn to the play; gone too without a chaperone! It's little she cares for me now-a-days, and it's all

your fault. She would never have looked at Sir Jenkyn had you done your duty. But all are alike, no one consults *my* wishes. Even Sir Madoc has gone to the coffee-room to see the *Times*. No one cares for my desolation," and the poor contracted fingers made an effort to raise a perfumed handkerchief to her eyes.

Arthur drew his chair to her side and attempted to soothe her. Some new expression on his countenance must have caught her eye.

"Who were those people you spoke to near the Baths?" asked she irritably.

"Friends of mine I met on my travels," replied he with good-humour.

"I should like to know the strange friends who could divert you from your duty!" she whined rather than exclaimed.

"Shall I introduce them?"

She turned her eyes full upon him as if she would have looked him through.

"Introduce them to *me?* Decidedly not. A soldier picks up acquaintances in his

travels not always suited for the society of his mother."

"You are quite right, madam, he *does*," he answered with some emphasis, and a meaning all his own, adding lightly, and with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I only thought you wished it." But he rose and paced the room asking himself who would be suited for the society of one so exacting and discontented.

"Do stop that monotonous tramp!" she whined presently. "And if you have no news to amuse me with, pray ring for candles and cards. We may manage to kill time with them."

Unprepared for eternity and yet anxious to *kill time!*

"Kill time? Nay mother, does not time kill us?"

A sudden reminder of all that time had killed in her and for her, smote the worldling. She shuddered, became hysterical, called for her maid and a vinaigrette, and was not to be comforted.

More than three-quarters of an hour were thus consumed, and then with many a sigh she composed her nerves in a game of piquet with her son, though it was an effort to hold the cards together in her hands, and the unwonted vivacity of her partner seemed to annoy rather than enliven.

That night as Owen removed the paint from the faded face, the too youthful robes from the rheumatic shoulders, she was asked,

"Did you ascertain who those people were?"

"They were strangers, ma'am. No one knew, but I'm sure I've seen the young lady's eyes before, somewhere."

"Eyes?" questioned her mistress, "eyes? What colour were they?"

"Brown, ma'am, very soft and large and mild."

"Ah!" And the eyes haunted the lady's sleepless pillow. They lit up the dreams of her son.

"Why, Muriel dear, Buxton seems to agree with you, I have not seen you so bright and

fresh since you came home!" cried Mrs. D'Anyer when Muriel carried an early breakfast to her bedside the next morning. "Have you been up long? I did not miss you."

"Up and out an hour ago!" was the ready answer. "I thought if I had my bath before breakfast, I should be completely at liberty to wait on you for yours. And who do you think I met on the way back? Who but Lieutenant Wynne. He offered to help me up the slope that faces the Crescent, and told me that the efficacy of the waters is tested in the ascent. People who hobble beneath on crutches when they come, mount to a higher level day by day as they improve. He was extremely kind when he discovered that it tried my foot to ascend, and insisted on my using his arm all the way back to the very door. I was much obliged, for the water I drank at the well seemed to flush my face and turn me giddy. He said it was always so at first."

The flush still lingered, and her eyes were

lit with joyous excitement. All her grandmother's cautions, all her own seemed to be forgotten in a newer dawn.

"In that case," said her mother gently, as she sipped her coffee, "you had better not go again to the baths, or the well until I can accompany you;" but whether she meant as a precaution against the officer or the mineral water did not appear.

She had her own bath in the forenoon, her own draught from St. Ann's restorative fountain, and discovering that they had a like effect on herself, was not sorry to accept the same strong arm on her way to the shopkeeper's on the Hall Bank, and even to the room above the shop. "It *might* be only the water that had so flushed *Muriel's* face, and the lieutenant was certainly most courteous to lend his arm to a middle-aged woman and adapt his steps to hers." And very polite it was of him to be so attentive when they again met him by accident that afternoon under the colonnade.

Mrs. D'Anyer was not a woman of th

world, and she argued from very narrow premises in this case. She had not been wont to chaperone an attractive grown-up daughter.

But in fact the area of Buxton proper was so circumscribed it was almost impossible for the comparatively few visitors bathing, or drinking the waters, to avoid meeting or otherwise coming in contact, howsoever rank or pride might hedge itself round with exclusiveness; and where there was a desire to meet, opportunity was not wanting.

Surely of these none met more frequently than Lieutenant Wynne and Muriel, or she fancied so. On her way alone from her own early morning bath, or when in attendance on her mother to hers, or to the springs, or on the promenade, or mounting the steep Stanecliff, he seemed ubiquitous. And whether he was with others and only touched his cap, or turned and walked by her side, or lent his arm to sustain Mrs. D'Anyer's unequal steps to the door on the Hall Bank, or sat with them for an hour after candles were lit, his respect-

ful bearing underwent no change, though as he watched the affectionate care of the girl for her parent, or listened to her when, as fond mothers will, she unsuspiciously dilated on the excellence of her child whenever Muriel was out of hearing, his esteem and admiration grew with every meeting, and love spoke eloquently in every look and tone.

As ever, love brought its own burden of doubt, and worry, and anxiety. He could not bow from the side of Mrs. Wynne's wheeled-chair, or touch his cap when riding with Sir Madoc and Pauline, or Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, or cross the promenade, or mount the hill with the D'Anyers, and not arrest the gaze of interested eyes.

A week had not passed before his mother assailed him with reproaches of neglect, and more. "You are bringing disgrace on your family, by consorting with a mere mantua-maker's apprentice and her plebeian mother," she complained; "I shall never survive it. Flaunting your acquaintance in my

very face. You could not do more if you meant to marry her!"

"And I *do* mean to marry her, *if* she will have me, as soon as I can do so justifiably," he answered steadily. "Honour forbids my marrying on a lieutenant's pay with so small a supplement as is mine at present, and I cannot involve the woman I love in the misery of poor gentility."

"You *love!* you *love!* This to me!" she almost shrieked. "I who would have given you half my fortune on your marriage with Pauline. But not one penny of mine shall pave the way for that common needlewoman to step into the place of Pauline, and call *me mother.* And if *honour* forbids, so do *I* forbid!"

"A common needlewoman!" he echoed. "Miss D'Anyer is one of those rare women whose price is above rubies! You are my mother, madam, and as such claim from me a son's respect; but there is a limit to forbearance, and I am not of a race to brook your scorn of so pure and sweet a girl. There is a spirit of rebellion in the blood,

as well you know!" and he strode from her presence only to encounter Sir Madoc in the colonnade before that blood had altogether cooled.

"I say, I say, nephew Arthur, who's that brown-eyed damsel you are dangling after at all hours? I don't suppose the old dame's the attraction."

"She is Miss D'Anyer, sir, a young lady for whom I have the very highest esteem," was said loftily.

"I say, that's rather strong, look you. But D'Anyer, D'Anyer!" and Sir Madoc, who had the pedigrees of two or three counties at his fingers' ends, tapped his snuff-box lid, and rolled the word on his tongue, as if to try its family flavour. "Any connection of the Cheshire D'Anyers of Frodsham and Lyme—the descendants of Thomas D'Anyer, the hero of Cressy, I mean?"

The suggestion was enough for Arthur Wynne. It recalled a conversation with Mrs. Kingsley on Red Riding Hood's ancestral and family associations with the county. "I

believe so," he said; "I know her only as the daughter of a Manchester manufacturer, but there is true nobility in her every look and word. She is a sweet, unselfish creature, a gem of the purest water, one in herself fit to adorn any rank, whatever her ancestry."

"I say, I say, Arthur, that won't do. What will Pauline say to your high-flown admiration of the manufacturer's daughter, look you?"

"She will echo what I said of her penchant for Sir Jenkyn; she was free to please herself," was the deliberate reply, over a pinch of snuff from Sir Madoc's box.

"Please herself!—*Sir Jenkyn!* I say, I say, what do you mean? Are not you to marry Pauline? And what has Sir Jenkyn or that D'Anyer girl to do with it, look you?" and Sir Madoc's cane went down on the pavement, with an irritable stroke.

"Have you been blind, uncle; or am I the first to tell you that Pauline would run off with Sir Jenkyn to-morrow, rather than be forced to marry me the day after?"

"Nonsense, boy. Sir Jenkyn's no more to Pauline than our old friend's son. It was settled in your cradles that you and Pauline should keep title and estates together for generations of Wynnes to come."

"Settled *for* us, uncle, you mean, not by us."

"I say, what do *you* mean, you young rascal? Are you going to cry off, and slander my daughter at the same time. I understood you and Pauline were dying for each other a year ago!"

"My dear sir, I am afraid you have *mis*-understood. Pauline and I have been most affectionate cousins, and probably might have run our heads blindfold into the noose prepared for us—a year ago, as you say. But we have both cut our wisdom teeth since then, and are not puppets. Pauline changed her mind when Sir Jenkyn came on the scene, and I—well, uncle, Sir Jenkyn is a good-natured young fellow, rides well, shoots well, rows well, boxes well, makes love like a devotee, has a clear estate, a long pedigree, and—what more would you have? Pauline

would prefer to take the leap with him rather than with her lukewarm cousin, depend upon it."

Sir Madoc was dumbfounded. His snuff-box suffered for his loss of speech. Then he spluttered out:—

"But, Arthur, I say, I say, I thought—I was told—you—you—Celia—your mother ——"

"Leave my mother entirely out of the question, sir," interrupted Arthur in a changed tone, in which was some bitterness. "My mother has long known *my* sentiments in the matter."

"I wish I had."

"Well, uncle, I was never asked. You took too much for granted. But neither you, sir, nor Pauline can accuse me of double dealing, or breach of faith. I neither made professions of attachment nor sought them. My attentions have been those of a cousin, not a lover. Sir Jenkyn came, and Pauline found the difference. She is not to blame—nor am I. Love comes at no man's bidding.

I have had a most unpleasant interview with my mother respecting—but here come Pauline and her cavalier, on their steeds. Watch them—Am I not right?"

"Egad, boy, I think you are. But, I say, I say, Arthur boy, you mean to marry Pauline, don't you?" and the tone in which the question was put seemed to tremble between the dolorous and the indignant.

An emphatic "*No*, sir!" and Arthur was gone.

A genial, kind-hearted, good-tempered fellow was Sir Madoc, when not thwarted, and not suffering from gout, the special malady which, in an incipient stage, had induced him at the last moment to bear Major Wynne's wife company thither—but he was somewhat obtuse, or heedless, and given to let the world wag on its way so long as his own little plans and arrangements were not disturbed. Sir Jenkyn's devotion to his daughter had not hitherto disturbed him greatly, since it did not disturb Arthur. It was Arthur's business, not his.

Arthur Wynne had opened his eyes and disturbed his equanimity with a vengeance. Bubbling over, he sought Mrs. Wynne, and had the matter out with her first. Then, there was a stormy interview, with Pauline, and then with Sir Jenkyn; and finding that only he and Celia held together on the marriage question, a letter went post-haste to the major to request his intervention. But a letter from his son already lay before the major, and moderated *his* views materially.

He had married beauty, birth, fortune. And to what end? The beauty which had enslaved him demanded more than one man's homage, courted the admiration of all eyes. His wife's money, chivalrously settled on herself and her issue, had scarcely sufficed for her thousand whims and caprices. A flutterer among flutterers, she had left her only son to the care of nurses and tutors—perhaps well for him—whilst she gave her waking hours to fashion and folly—a whirl of pleasure which had undermined her own health and involved him in a duel.

Yet he had idolized her until her own selfishness and vanity had broken the charm. He was not sorry to be rid of her vagaries when, after a serious difference, she elected to make the Plas her head-quarters. To the early matrimonial compact for the young people, he had given a negative assent; and so long as he was led to believe that his son's heart was set on Pauline, he remained quiescent, although he would have preferred a daughter-in-law who had had a good mother's training, and a less sophisticated chaperon. Now that he learned the truth for the first time, he was not minded that Celia should spoil the life of their son as she had spoiled his; and in the epistle which had come from honest, simple-hearted, transparent Sir Madoc, he traced the diplomatic finger of his wife. That influenced his answers to both. But letters did not fly on the wings of steam.

When on the Saturday afternoon Arthur Wynne the younger had gone through those explanations, terminated with a decisive

"No," he had marched straight away from Sir Madoc to his own room, and on the spur of the moment penned his confidential epistle to the major, in which he had poured forth not only his objections to a marriage with his cousin Pauline but his love for Muriel D'Anyer, coupled as it was with doubts whether honour did not forbid his marriage, and consequently his proposing to her, on the scant pay of a lieutenant, knowing as he did that his good father could only add to his allowance by personal sacrifice.

The letter was in the little post-office in time for the south mail at seven that evening, and had thus been in Major Wynne's hands, and was read and well digested, before Sir Madoc's important missive offered its vermilion seal and coat of arms to be broken by authorized fingers.

CHAPTER II.

A DOOR FOR ESCAPE.

THE major was pretty correct in his judgment. If the penmanship of the epistle was Sir Madoc's, the baronet's impulsive diction had been checked and curbed by hints and suggestions from Mrs. Wynne. It had, in fact, been a joint concoction, to which had been devoted the morning hours when Arthur and Pauline would be "safely out of the way at church," as Mrs. Wynne expressed it.

She might have felt it otherwise than "safely" had she reflected that Mrs. D'Anyer and her daughter were likely to be among the worshippers in the little old, barn-like church on the hill-side, or that Sir Jenkyn might find his way thither, and supplant her son even at the church door.

At all events, she was not too well pleased when Miss Wynne, wearing a robe of canary taffeta, trimmed with lilac satin rouleaux, a lilac scarf across her shoulders, and a straw hat in which nodded three lilac feathers, and to whom the said Sir Jenkyn had made his bow at the door under shadow of the colonnade, walked unattended into her presence and, throwing down her large parasol, complained of the "insufferable heat."

"Where is Arthur?" she asked, to be answered with scornful indifference, "Oh, the owner of a Prayer-book with massive silver clasps required a page to carry it, and I presume he offered his services, since I saw it in his hand."

"Absurd!" ejaculated Mrs. Wynne.

"Well, it *was rather;* for had not the book been fit for a countess, I might have taken the owner for that dressmaking young woman he has been so gallant to of late."

Mrs. Wynne's brow darkened. "Is it possible that my son could so far forget

himself in the face of a whole congregation?"

"Oh, quite possible," with a shrug.

"Leave *you* to walk home unattended?" and the enormity thereof was expressed in look and tone.

"Well, no, not exactly. There was Sir Jenkyn—and—a—David, you know." David was a foot-boy.

Miss Pauline had omitted to say that Mrs. D'Anyer was with her daughter at the time, or that Sir Jenkyn had previously superseded Arthur in his attendance on herself; not that it would have mattered much to Mrs. Wynne, who felt as if her son's atrocious conduct must be the common gossip of Buxton society. She could only cite as an excuse for him "the example of royal dukes in seeking companions among their inferiors, my dear," and "trust Pauline to hold him excused, as it meant nothing."

It certainly meant nothing then to Miss Wynne, whatever it might have done previously to the advent of Sir Jenkyn in

Buxton. But prior to that the dark-eyed belle had learned to dispense with much of her cousin's attention; and latterly had avoided it.

To *him* it meant everything in the world. It meant the rest which twilight affords after the glare of the sun. It meant the hope of a life-companion worthy of all his trust; one whose feet were on the ascent to the heavenly city, not whirling downward in the path of folly, towards the gates of destruction. And if he carried Muriel's Bible, it was not to note or value its silver clasps, but with an unshaped consciousness that she was building up her life on its foundation. She was "different from all the women with whom he had come in contact," as he told his father; and he "should never rest until he had her promise to be his wife."

So that his walk from the church gates with Muriel and her mother to the lodgings over the closed shop, in the face of his Cousin Pauline and of the fashionable church-goers and aristocratic loungers, did mean something,

however Mrs. Wynne might seek to ignore it.

"Buxton really does seem to agree with you, my dear," said Mrs. D'Anyer to Muriel the next day, as she came in from a morning stroll with a flush on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye, and laid a book from the library on the small round table. "I wish *I* did not feel so prostrate and drowsy after my baths, and could take the air with you, instead of lying here on a sofa, looking through a window all the forenoon."

"Oh, those are only the ordinary symptoms when the baths are efficacious, Lieutenant Wynne informed me just now. He said his mother felt just the same for the first week or ten days; that was why she was carried to and fro in a sedan; but now, as you know, she goes in her regular wheel-chair. He hopes you may be able to throw away your stick in a few days."

"I hope so, too. And so you met Lieutenant Wynne again?"

"Well, not exactly. I was trying how

far I could mount up Stanecliff, when he came behind me and offered his arm for the ascent, though I told him that was scarcely allowing a fair trial of my strength. He had a gun on his shoulder, and was going, with a party of friends I saw in front of the old Hall, grouse-shooting on the moors."

"You did not allow his politeness to keep him from his friends, I trust?"

"Oh, no, I—I think not." But Muriel felt her colour deepen as she bent down, pressed a kiss on her mother's cheek, and left the room hastily to remove her hat and scarf. If to escape further comment on her appearance, who shall say?

She certainly had grown brighter, brisker, and stronger; but whether the society of the young officer had not as much to do with it as the Buxton air and waters, is a moot point. Mrs. Wynne might slight and scorn her, but she bore it calmly so long as *he* did not despise her, and she knew that Major Wynne did not; and if she forgot all about her grandmother's caution in the delicious

sensation of the hour, who could blame her? Her life had had few pleasures, least of all the pleasure of feeling valued by someone else; courtesy and attention had not been for her.

True, when she had last lain on the sofa at home, two of her masculine cousins had been more than commonly friendly, but their familiar attention was something very different from the respectful homage of Arthur Wynne, and that had its full weight. No wonder she put her memories of the dreary work-room behind her, lest even its shadow should cross the sunshine on her path and mar her present felicity. She would not even look forward, lest duty should extinguish joy. At least she did not. If she had only looked, the light upon her face would have faded. Indeed, before that very day wore out, she had a reminder that pleasure could not last.

They had just risen from a plain dinner of trout, fresh from the Wye, with a custard for a supplement, when in walked Joe Bent

in his uniform, of which the volunteer corporal seemed as proud as if he had been a captain in the Guards. Indeed, I am not sure that he did not consider the volunteers superior to the regulars, in that they were unpaid and so far free.

Be that as it may, preceded by a lumbering step up the dark and narrow staircase, he put in an appearance with a hamper in his hands, and the exclamation, "Well, aunt, you did not expect to see me! But here I am, and here is a basket of things from the Grange—poultry, fruit, and I don't know what. Mother said you would find them useful, as there was no market, and the higglers were such extortioners. And there are some of our early grapes at the top; I suppose you could not get those here at any price," he added, having by this time got rid of his burthen, and begun shaking Muriel's hands as if he had taken possession of her.

And nothing would serve, as he had already dined at the inn, but he should take possession of his cousin and aunt for an

afternoon exploration of the village. Buxton had not attained the dignity of a market-town. The spar-shop under the Arcade was included in the tour, and it so came about that there was a handsome Blue-John vase upon the table, a gift to his aunt, and a necklace of satin-stone beads round Muriel's throat, when, as it happened, Lieutenant Wynne—who had somehow gained a familiar footing there—presented himself in the evening with a brace of grouse for the ladies, undeterred by the rain which was then falling fast.

Observing a stranger, he would have presented his birds and retired had not Mrs. D'Anyer detained him, and introduced her nephew, an introduction which seemed to give more pleasure to her than to the young man, whose open face clouded.

Arthur Wynne's name was not unknown to the corporal, and Joe eyed him dubiously.

On the other hand, Lieutenant Wynne, who noted both the vase and the new necklace, saw a possible rival in the very-much-at-home

cousin. But he was too well bred to display the contempt affected by many of his brother officers for the new volunteer service; and being desirous to ascertain on what footing the tall young relative stood with Muriel and with society, he composedly took a seat between the two windows, at which sat respectively Mrs. D'Anyer and her daughter, and entering into conversation made himself agreeable—even to Corporal Joseph Bent.

His chair was slightly in advance of Muriel, then netting in the window-seat, for the benefit of the waning light, but it required no effort to watch her every movement in the strip of looking-glass which adorned the opposite wall, with a triplet of peacock feathers atop, and in which was reflected not only Muriel, but Joe Bent on the sofa, leaning well over the low arm in closer proximity than he thought their cousinship warranted.

"Well, aunt, where's it to be? Poole's Hole, or Axe Edge, or Monsal Dale, or Castleton, or Chatsworth, or where?" cried Joe,

resuming after a time an interrupted discussion. "If you can't sit a horse yet, I'll hire a roomy gig that'll hold us all three; and though I'm not counted such a whip as Bob, I'll drive you anywhere there is room for a pair of wheels. You see, lieutenant," he went on, addressing the latter, "I knew aunt and cousin would go nowhere by themselves, so I set off by the coach this morning to take them about a bit."

"I wonder if 'them' means both, or only Muriel?" thought the said lieutenant, but he only replied:

"I am sorry to find myself forestalled. I came hither this evening to place a chaise and myself at the service of the ladies for the morrow. But if——"

"Hang his impudence!" thought Joe, as he interrupted him with, "I don't think they'd see much mewed up in a chaise, thank you all the same, lieutenant; and Muriel wants all the fresh air she can get before she goes back to be cooped up under Mrs. Hopley's finger and thumb."

"Goes back!" echoed Arthur Wynne in dismay. "Surely Miss D'Anyer is not going back to—to that unfeeling woman!"

"I have to fulfil the term of my apprenticeship," said Muriel quietly, unaware how the last word jarred on the lieutenant's nerves.

"Yes, worse luck!" put in blunt Joe Bent.

"My good Mrs. D'Anyer!" the other broke forth in a state of mental perturbation, "you really should interfere to prevent such a sacrifice. I had no suspicion Miss D'Anyer was about to return. Is it not possible to rescue her from that—that—hardened brute of a dressmaker?" (Muriel shook her head.) "Surely there must be some means to save your amiable daughter from such cruel bondage." He had almost said drudgery.

"No, sir; we have no alternative, I am sorry to say. Her grandmother, who now regrets placing her there, has made several overtures to Mrs. Hopley, but for some unknown reason she rejects money, and will

not be paid off," answered Mrs. D'Anyer gravely. "There is, however, one thing certain: she will not be allowed to starve my dear daughter again. Mrs. Kingsley and a friend in Wrexham will watch over her, and if needful, send in supplies by their market carts."

"Really, madam, the very precaution proves how monstrous must be the case, What does Mr. D'Anyer think of it?"

The reply came from Joe Bent. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, aunt, there has been a regular quarrel over it between uncle and Mrs. Bancroft since you left; and he went to Bob's office to get at the law of the case, with all the blood of all the D'Anyers since Cressy flaming in his face."

"Yes, so I have heard," was her quiet rejoinder, as if to close the conversation.

All this was news to Muriel, who listened without speaking. A letter had come to her mother, but its contents were only partially known to her.

Arthur Wynne bent forward eagerly.

"And the lawyer pointed out how you might circumvent the petticoated Shylock?" was rather a suggestion to Mrs. D'Anyer than an inquiry. In his recruiting experience he had learned somewhat of apprentice-law.

"Certainly," was the prompt reply of Joe.

But Mrs. D'Anyer hesitated, her voice dropped as though to reach no ears but the questioner's, and she evidently spoke with reluctance, "Yes, sir, but the door of escape was not open to Muriel."

Joe must have had sharp ears, for he called out from the sofa, "Don't say that, aunt!" in a tone which sent a spasm of something like jealousy through Arthur Wynne's frame.

Muriel, silently intent on the conversation, made a long stitch in her netting, while she glanced at her mother over Arthur Wynne's bent shoulders, and wondered what door of escape was that of which she had never heard and her mother seemed so loth to speak.

And Arthur Wynne, for the moment oblivious of those around him, wondered if

he might be allowed to open it. For her sake, for his own, he could not permit her sacrifice, as he considered it.—What was that the beloved girl was saying so composedly?

"I think, mother, that as my grandmother promised I should go back, I am bound to go, whether we like it or not."

"But, Miss D'Anyer," remonstrated the young Fusilier, "remember what you have suffered; imagine what may lie before you."

"Yes, I know;" and Muriel shook her head, with a sigh which went to his heart; "but I was not treated worse than others, and much of what I endured towards the last was due to my accident, for which Mrs. Hopley was in no way accountable; and I must not cause my grandmother to break her word, even if the law allows it."

Joe chuckled comfortably to himself, as much as to say, "We shall see!" and "We will see" was the inner thought of Arthur Wynne, but he only "hoped something might occur to set her free," which hope had a double echo.

The question was then dropped, as candles were brought in, and the white dimity curtains drawn. That of the excursion was then renewed, when it was finally settled, little to Corporal Bent's satisfaction, that Lieutenant Wynne should join the party, on the morrow, on horseback, and take charge of Muriel, for whom he engaged to provide one of the small, steady-going native horses accustomed to the Derbyshire roads; he having succeeded in convincing the volunteer that no gig capable of holding three was to be found in Buxton, seeing that the native vehicles were constructed for narrow roads and passes, and that if he wished to give his aunt an airing he must be content with her for his companion.

Then ensued another discussion on the route to be taken, the lieutenant, who had gained some experience during his stay, intimating that only pack-horse roads and bridges were to be found in certain directions, and Poole's Hole, Chee Tor and Sherbrook Dell, could not possibly be reached in any

vehicle. Fairfield, he said, had an old church worth seeing, and a fine view of Buxton extending even to Axe Edge might be obtained from the Barms—or racecourse—by, provided no mist hid the mountain. They might catch a glimpse of Ashford Dale, he intimated, in crossing the Wye-bridge; and unless the ladies or Corporal Bent had any other proposal to make, he would respectfully suggest Fairfield as their destination, since the distance would not be such as to fatigue Mrs. D'Anyer.

Joe's knowledge of Buxton and its surroundings was all second-hand; so, much against his will, he was constrained to defer to the lieutenant. Muriel and Mrs. D'Anyer were equally without an opinion or a wish save for propitious weather.

It was with very different emotions the two young men went to make their separate arrangements for the morrow.

"Confound his cool impudence!" was Joseph Bent's private ejaculation. "Why should he thrust himself into our party with

his views and suggestions, and appropriate Muriel all to himself? It's lucky I came; and just as lucky he can't stay. He seemed mightily at home there. But pshaw! soldiers in the line are here to-day and gone to-morrow; I needn't be afraid of him."

"It was well I carried those birds myself," ruminated Arthur Wynne on his way to the stables, "and I was within an ace of sending Norris. It's a most fortunate circumstance, I might not otherwise have known how the darling girl is circumstanced. And it has thrown a marvellous opportunity in my way. It will never do to let that cotton-spinner's free-and-easy son forestall me. How jaunty and how confident he was! That necklace and the vase were certainly his gifts. How I envied his privilege of presentation. I should have been afraid to presume. And perhaps the fellow presumed on his cousinship to clasp his beads around her neck!"

There was a long drawn breath between set teeth,—the sacrilege was not to be

thought of without a pang,—"I must do it, I must. Now there is a prospect of promotion, I can rescue the sweet girl without danger of plunging her into the misery of genteel poverty. I may lose her if I wait my father's answer; or I may be recalled ere that arrives," ran the current of the lieutenant's meditations, "and yet ——" His arrival at the stables cut his reverie short for the time being.

The "prospect of promotion" had come to him in a letter from Chatham which Mr. Moore, the postmaster, had put in his hands that afternoon — a long letter from his father, the contents of which, being mainly regimental, he had imparted to Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne, to be widely disseminated in the Assembly Rooms that night over their cards; the possession of so much news having overcome the dread of the latter to sink to her place amongst the elderly dowagers and spinsters at the card and gossip tables.

There was more in the letter than was laid bare to them, for the major wrote very

freely to his son, and what he wrote had especial import to Arthur at that crisis.

It appeared that the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers, of which only the customary contingent remained in England, and which had won so much distinction at Port au-Prince the previous year, had come back from St. Domingo to the depôt at Chatham, the mere skeleton of a regiment. The fiery climate had made more havoc than steel or gunpowder. Then followed personal comments on privates or brother officers, who had been left behind for ever in that island of dread, where Yellow Jack was king, some whose friendship he had valued and regretted. Next came an exhortation from the major to his son not to loiter in Buxton now that Mrs. Wynne was settled in apartments, and stronger, but to hold himself in readiness to be up and doing as soon as the Adjutant General's orders reached him. Recruiting would have to be no child's play merely to keep up the efficient strength of the regiment, but earnest, thorough, to re-create

and form anew; and he might have to beat up North Wales once more. He was also reminded that with so many gaps to be filled up, the promotion of an active subaltern was next to certain.

It was this missive that, in spite of regret for friends whose hands might clasp his nevermore, had sent him, with pulses beating and cheeks in a glow, to Hall Bank through the rain, carrying the birds he had shot.

A straw will turn a wavering balance. The major had thrown one straw into the scale, Joe Bent had cast in another. Arthur paced the colonnade that night long after the blinking lights of Buxton had gone out, one by one, to think out by himself the momentous question wherein his own future lay; and with his own that of a dearer one. Whether he should risk all by an immediate declaration, or bide the issue of his father's decision. "Not for myself, not for myself, but for her!" he debated. "A false step might be ruinous to both. I cannot have my father's answer until Thursday

—and before Thursday what might not—well, I have no time to lose, the morrow might recall me. I *must* speak, for *her* sake; —aye, and for my own, for my heart is bursting. I may lose her if I hesitate, and she must not be sacrificed. My father would never have named promotion, had it not been certain. Yet, should he disapprove my choice, would it be certain? Pshaw! I wrong my father's honour by such a doubt; he is neither prejudiced nor unjust; and did not he marry to please himself?" That last argument set its seal on doubt. "I must, I must, if I would not resign her to the rough wooing of that volunteer cousin, who had no more decency than to make a covert offer before my very face. No, no, Mr. Corporal, Muriel is not for you. You must pardon me if I use your own weapons to fight against you."

The lieutenant stopped at the door to go in, first glancing up at the sky, where a silvery moon was sailing among fleecy clouds, and gave promise of a bright to-morrow. A

broad patch of moonlight slanting between two pillars of the arcade, rested on his form, lit up the doorway as he entered; he accepted the augury with as radiant a smile.

Tuesday morning broke full of promise for the day. The showers of the night had only served to lay the dust and refresh the wayside flowers and foliage. The Wye, not then so far covered up from the light of day, shone and sparkled, and danced along as merrily as the current in a lover's veins—here in sunshine, there in shadow—here glassed like a mirror, there fretting in foam over rocks and boulders, as a lover might fret and chafe at impediments—or so thought Arthur Wynne (to whom as yet no peremptory recall had come). He and Muriel having the start led the way along the winding road, keeping well ahead of the gig, a cramped, clumsy and heavy affair, not likely to spin along too rapidly. But he found Muriel such a novice in horsemanship, he had so many hints to give, such a careful watch to keep on her every move-

ment, and he so dreaded startling her with an abrupt declaration of his feelings, that in his impatience he felt the time slipping by, and his opportunity with it.

Yet not wholly, for those very instructions afforded opportunities for words, and looks, and tones which needed no interpreter, and he could not readjust the reins without the irresistible temptation to press and hold her hands if but for a moment. And Muriel must have been less than a woman if she had not seen, and felt, what was impending. That he was not repulsed spoke volumes.

Indeed—Muriel was more self-possessed than he—it may be she was on her guard, it may be she had her horse to guide, but though she never looked up at him, she directed his attention, now to the clearness of the water, then to the beauty of rocks or foliage, and as they were crossing the bridge on the Fairfield road, where to the right the beauties of Ashwood Dale invited foot and eye, with its tall limestone cliffs set like

ramparts to guard the little river winding at their base, she reminded him that he was neglecting the very scenery they had come to admire.

"Nay, Miss D'Anyer, others might come to view scenery; I came for another purpose; and all I care to see, all the charm of the landscape, all the world holds of good or beautiful for me, is by my side—came with me."

The gig was far in the rear, and out of sight. There was no one on the road. He laid his hand on hers, as if to steady it, and went on, "You were but a child and I a boy, my dear Miss D'Anyer, when these gentle fingers closed the wound on my brow, and I learned how kind, pitiful, and patient was the little maid I called Red Riding Hood. Years went by; the wound that healed on my brow had opened in my heart; and, Muriel —may I not call you Muriel, *my* Muriel?— I found that only the same hand could heal it."

Muriel had miscalculated her strength, or she was not prepared for this, she felt dizzy, a mist seemed to come before her eyes, her

colour went. He saw the change, and ere she knew how it occurred he was off his horse, and had her in his supporting arms under shelter of the tall cliff, imploring her forgiveness for his precipitancy, the well-trained animals standing still, and looking on as if in sympathy.

"You will forgive me, Muriel, will you not?" She made no effort to release herself, and he took silence for assent. "I have so much to ask, so much to say, and if I seem precipitate it is because I may be recalled any hour." (Muriel started. Was his recall so near?) "I could only use the brief moments granted me to tell you how sincerely, how devotedly, I love you, and to ask if you would be my own dear wife;" and a second time he pressed her fingers to his lips.

Hoof beats and wheels drew near; she had barely time to withdraw from his encircling arms, when the gig came in sight, upon the narrow bridge and there was a shout from Joe:—

"Halloo, what's the matter?"

"I went dizzy, that was all," said Muriel; "I am better now," her colour coming and going strangely as she spoke.

"Humph! you shouldn't ride so fast," from Joe.

"I hope your faintings are not going to return," cried the mother anxiously. "You see, she is not much accustomed to riding." This by way of excuse. "Perhaps we had better go back."

Muriel would not hear of this; she declared she was better, and ready to remount. But to this Arthur Wynne put in his word, suggesting that her cousin might drive on slowly, whilst she rested a few minutes on a large stone hard by; the gig would be soon overtaken; to which, after some demur, she and Joe both assented. It was this desire of hers to go forward that disarmed Joe's suspicions. Mrs. D'Anyer had not conceived any.

A shrinking that was not timidity impelled Muriel to remount, a glance of hopeless sadness in her lover's eye impelled her to remain.

The horses were securely tethered before the gig was gone, and the first low words she heard were, "I was afraid you were leaving me to despair. What answer am I to expect from your stay?" He saw she was pale, and still, and grave, and his buoyant hopes fell.

There was silence, unbroken save by the song of birds. He stood before her, watching her sobering face. "Miss D'Anyer," he asked, with quiet intenseness, "have I been too presumptuous? Can you *not* love me?"

Back came the crimson tide to cheek and brow, and down went the tell-tale face into the trembling hands, as if to hide the lips from which burst the words, "Love you! ah, too well!"

There was space on the rock for two, or he made it. He imprisoned her hands, her form. She loved him, and that alone was ecstasy. The words were low and broken in which he told his joy.

But she shrank from his clasp. "Don't,"

said she, "I cannot bear it; I must not listen to you. Let us go."

"Love me, and not listen to me?" he questioned in amazement. "What can this mean?"

"It means," said she, summoning all her strength, "that I cannot bring disunion into a family, and therefore cannot marry you. Mrs. Wynne would scorn the mantua-maker's apprentice, and you forget, sir, I am still that, and am due at Mrs. Hopley's in October."

"Forget it! That I do not! My beloved Muriel, if you will only become mine, we may set Mrs. Hopley at defiance. She cannot claim a married woman as an apprentice."

A light broke on Muriel. *This* was the door of escape the law opened to her. This was the secret of his declaration. Had Arthur Wynne lost sight of his integrity in his desire to spare her another year's probation? Was he braving the displeasure of his family for *that?* Her grandmother's caution came swooping down like a hawk

upon the fluttering joy-bird in her breast—the bliss of being loved, and by *him*. She must not, dared not cherish it.

She rose to her feet. Her agitation was apparent through all her effort to seem calm. "I thank you, sir, for the honour you would do me, for—for the sacrifices you are willing to make for *me*, but duty forbids that I should purchase happiness at such a price. Our union could only drag you down—cause dissensions and difficulties, bring ultimate misery to both. Your mother would never consent—my grandmother would not. She objects to hasty marriages. She has passed her word for my return, and would not break it for the world." The voice, momentarily proud, dropped to sadness. "And oh, Arthur Wynne, I thought you too noble to take advantage of a legal quibble for any end!"

He too was on his feet. His heart gave a great bound. Did ever his own name sound so sadly sweet before? Was this the patient, unresisting Muriel who had submitted to the

yoke of her hard task-mistress without revolt? This fragile creature firmly resisting self, with a code of honour higher than his own.

He took her hands, and she released them. "My friends will be uneasy; let us rejoin them," said she.

"Tell me first," he asked, "why you feel bound to keep faith with a woman who so grossly broke faith with you?"

"We are answerable to God for our own actions, not for those of others. Mrs. Hopley's wrong-doing would not justify mine. To her own Master she must stand or fall." She spoke quietly, and with a movement towards the horses, already showing signs of impatience. He assisted her to her saddle in silence; yet, ere he left her side, he said, in a subdued voice, "Muriel, you say you love me, and in spite of this repulse I must believe you, for the sake of my own peace. If I wait for you until you are released from bondage, will you be my wife then?"

The answer came low, but clear: "If your friends consent,—yes!"

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING RASH.

THE gig-horse had been allowed to take its own leisurely pace, whilst Joe Bent expounded his private views with relation to Muriel, which were pretty much those of Lieutenant Wynne; namely, that he should marry Muriel forthwith, and "laugh at old Mother Hopley," as he phrased it.

He had not brought his aunt out solely for the benefit of the air, or the admiration of scenery, and, not having Muriel by his side, endeavoured to turn the drive to account and do a little courtship at second-hand, contentedly assuming that his proposal was one to be snapped at.

He had imagined his attentions to have been all along so self-evident, that he was astonished to find he had taken his aunt very much by surprise; but it ended in his

being referred to Muriel herself, subject also to the approval of the folk at the Grange, and to her father and grandmother likewise.

He had thought it might be "settled right off."

"I've no fear for the old folk at the Grange, not I," cried confident Joe, "Father'll be glad to see one of us settled down, and as for mother I've heard her wish she'd a daughter like Muriel, scores of times. And I know you've only to put in a good word for me, Aunt, and the business is done."

"I think not, Joe," calmly answered Mrs. D'Anyer, "Muriel is easy and unselfish, but she forms her own opinions, and is not to be led in such a matter."

Self-satisfied Joe might have no fears about the people at home, but he saw something in the faces of Muriel and her companion, when they overtook the gig, that rather puzzled him, still he chuckled inwardly with the calm conviction that he would soon put the intrusive lieutenant to the right-about, and forestall his cousin Fawcett. Had he

not known Muriel all her life? and had they not been the very best of friends since her return home? He was confident she liked him.

Aye, so she did, but liking is not loving, and he went back to Manchester by the Wednesday evening coach a little wiser, and somewhat less confident; and if anyone had been sent to the right-about it was certainly not the lieutenant, though he too had a confidential interview with Mrs. D'Anyer, and was referred back to the heads of families on both sides.

She had never been in a dressmaker's work-room, and the disparity in position created by Muriel's apprenticeship did not strike the little woman as it struck her sensitive daughter.

The "marrying forthwith" had however been expunged from the young Fusilier's programme by Muriel herself, and consequently he awaited his father's answer to his appeal with much more composure than did Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne to theirs. He was secure of Muriel's affection, had no

doubts of her constancy or his own, and could wait for the rest. They, on the contrary, became the more irritable, as every day brought fresh proofs of Arthur's defection, and of Miss Pauline's headstrong bias for the dismissed Sir Jenkyn; all the stronger for the opposition it encountered.

Sir Madoc, who had mounted guard over his daughter, and had been kept by that damsel of spirit in a state of mental and bodily activity, inimical to gouty proclivities, absolutely pounced on the major's letter when David carried it with his chocolate to his bedside on the Thursday morning—David having been charged to watch the arrival of the mail, and obtain the expected missive from the postmaster without delay.

It was laconic if not consolatory.

"CHATHAM, *Sept.*, 1796.

"DEAR MADOC,—

"My legal control over my son ceased when he came of age.

"Yours,

"A. WYNNE."

"Indeed, then we must diplomatise," said the spectre of vanity in the wheeled-chair when it was shown to her. "Finesse may win where coercion fails. Major Wynne never did see his duty to his wife and son in a proper light. I am scarcely surprised at his apathy now."

What would she have said had she looked over her son's shoulder as he read his answer from the same pen by the same post?

"CHATHAM, *Sept.*, 1796.

"MY DEAR ARTHUR,—

"Your sentiments do you honour. I am proud of you. Let Pauline marry whom she will; you are right, she is not the wife for you. A wife's money is a shackle, unless you can count guinea for guinea of your own.

"If you live long enough, the Plas and all the entailed estate will be yours without the wife. Cousins should not intermarry.

"Touching Miss D'Anyer, I don't say 'Aye' and I don't say 'Nay.'"

"Though a child when I saw her, she gave

promise of future worth. She was *not* beautiful, but I can allow for a lover's rhapsodies, and see the beauty of the soul in a plain face.

"Her present social position is a draw-back not to be lightly regarded by a subaltern who hopes to rise; but if, as you say, Miss D'Anyer *is well connected*, it is not insurmountable.

"But—a big *but*, Arthur—don't be in haste. You seem conscious that a poor lieutenant has no right to marry on his pay. Don't let Miss D'Anyer's many virtues run away with your common sense.

"Say nothing until you have seen me, and *do nothing rash*. Commend me to your fair one, and to your mother. I am glad to hear she is somewhat better.

"Your affectionate Father,

"Arthur Wynne."

Along with his father's letter had come his official recall. As he glanced over that sheet he said to himself, "Do nothing rash! My dear father, I already had done something *very* rash. I may thank my stars the

right-minded girl did not take me altogether at my word. Our marriage must have been as precipitate as my offer, had she consented to obtain release as I proposed. In the year's probation what may I not achieve? my captaincy and my mother's consent — of my father's I have no doubt." He was taking the consent of all Muriel's friends for granted, since Mrs. D'Anyer had herself seemed willing, much as Joe Bent had done.

He had only two days to call his own. He must spend the fleeting hours with Muriel if possible, and yet his mother must not have reason to complain of his neglect. So many things had to be talked over and settled. And he did not altogether forget that Muriel's was only a provisional accept- ance after all.

He sped across the open promenade, called the Gravel, with all haste, hoping to find the D'Anyers among the water-drinkers at St. Ann's Well. He found them seated in one of the arched niches outside the small building,

and taking a vacant seat beside Muriel, acquainted them with his recall to Chatham.

"I had been led to expect it any day, but scarcely thought it would arrive so speedily. And, never did the call of duty find me less prepared," he said looking steadfastly at Muriel, the roses which had bloomed on her cheeks at his approach having paled as rapidly.

"I know not how I shall tear myself away," he added in a whisper audible only to the one who could not trust her voice to utter a syllable in reply. It seemed as if her new-born happiness was being strangled, and she with it.

Her mother came to the rescue with a commonplace question or two.

"It is very sudden," the girl said at length, under her breath, as if the suddenness had taken her breath away. It was only three days since he had asked her to be his wife straightway, and now he was going to leave her; what could it all mean? She heard him explain to her mother, and she heard him

express a hope that he should be again stationed at Chester for a time, and as she listened she grew more composed. No one was ordinarily more amenable to the call of duty than herself. On the Monday she had promptly set self aside at its bidding. Still for three days she had given herself up to the luxury of being loved and cared for, and this was the result. She had no strength to face the coming parting. The solid ground seemed to have slid from beneath her feet, and left her in a state of collapse.

It was the time for her mother's bath ; and for once she had to be reminded. Lieutenant Wynne accompanied them to the vestibule, and then, whilst waiting on her mother, she silently took herself to task for her weakness and mistrust.

When an hour and a half later he called for Muriel to take a ramble alone with him, whilst Mrs. D'Anyer rested on the sofa, he found her composed and cheerful, much more so than he was himself. Unconsciously they bent their course to the banks of the rapid

and pellucid Wye, and having no gig to bind them arbitrarily to the Fairfield road, they passed the end of the bridge without crossing it and rambled on by the river side through the enchanting windings of Ashwood Dale, under precipices fringed with feathery ferns, o'erhung with the mountain ash and rich with the tints of autumn, until at length they stood beneath the tall, rugged, weather-beaten grey cliff known as the Lover's Leap, and there they rested, nor cared to round its base, though Sherbrook Dell might well have invited them, could the sound of its rushing waterfall have been heard.

It was scarcely an auspicious spot for the exchange of lovers' vows, since the legends of the hoary precipice are sad ones, but its name alone was known to them, and Muriel had already taxed her weak ankle as far as was prudent, and they sat together, she with her bonnet off, her head upon his breast, his arm around her, on the broken limestone below the towering cliff, forgetful of the flight of time, and all but their

own absorbing emotions, and coming separation.

There, with no witness save a water-ousel that hopped upon a stone and perked its saucy head aside as if intent, then dipped into the stream and ran along beneath well pleased, she ratified her promise to be his should he claim her when Mrs. Hopley's right expired; but still she made the promise conditional on the assent of friends, neither argument nor persuasion causing her to waver.

"My father is a very proud man," she said; "he would never suffer me to enter any family where I was unwelcome, and I am afraid Grandmother Bancroft would think me too young to marry, even a year hence; but I shall never marry anyone else, for I can never love any other as I love you, that is certain;" and though the answer did not content him, and he told her she was "cold, and cruel," he could obtain no other.

"I am not cruel," she maintained, "but I

owe a duty to them, as you to your parents. I cannot promise more than duty to them—and to you—will sanction."

"But you will wear this for my sake, darling, will you not, as a token of our betrothal?"

"Yes," she whispered, as he placed upon her finger an opal ring, in which a lambent flame seemed to play as if it were a tongue of fire. "Yes, and if you like, I will break a sixpence with you here by this waterside, and beneath this Lover's Rock, as a witness between us, that though time, or distance, or friends may divide us, we will still be true one to the other."

"True one to the other," he echoed, as the thin white coin was snapped in twain, "but you harp on the one string. Why will you only anticipate separation? If you remain constant, nothing can divide us, nothing shall divide us," and he tightened his clasp of her form as if to intensify his words.

"Hush!" she murmured fearfully, "we may plan, but only God may control."

"True," he answered; and as he still held her to his heart, there was a solemn and a reverent pause—emotion too full for speech. Still he had a sanguine nature, and chid her lovingly for her saddening want of confidence in the future.

It was a trying hour for both of them. They had stood as it were for a brief moment on the threshold of felicity, only to see the portals barred against them and feel dragged asunder invisible hands; and the kisses they exchanged partook more of the solemnity of parting than of love's impassioned ecstacy.

On the Saturday Arthur Wynne was gone, bearing with him a long silken purse of Muriel's netting, in which the broken piece of silver lay enshrined with a lock of her brown hair; and the sunshine seemed to have gone with him, for the skies wept as he went, and Muriel could not smile over his departure, try as bravely as she might.

She endeavoured to buoy herself up with the prospect of meeting him ere long in

Chester; but Mrs. Hopley, and her work-room would come into the picture, and chill her with the fear that to meet him would be almost as impracticable as unwise. She would have to think not only of her own good name, but of his. But however she was torn with the conflict of emotion and duty she kept a careful guard upon herself, and Mrs. D'Anyer little thought how deep and strong was the current of feeling hidden under the girl's serene countenance, and cheerful demeanour. She said little about her lover or she might have broken down. A crystal-locket containing a single dark curl could have told how her heart beat and fluttered at the mention of his name, and the tongue of flame in the opal ring might have spoken of secret glances and kisses given to the senseless stone had either had a voice.

Wonderful! No sooner had her son taken his departure than Mrs. Wynne condescended to be gracious to Miss D'Anyer. Was it in deference to his farewell entreaty, think

you? Nay, that would not have moved her. Was it not rather a touch of her diplomatic art.

She had rejoiced at Arthur's recall, and had bade Sir Madoc rejoice too, as removing Arthur from evil influence and leaving her free "to diplomatise." But easy going Sir Madoc was getting pretty well tired of Mrs. Wynne's scheming and of keeping watch and ward over self-willed Pauline, and though he would naturally have preferred to keep the plas for his daughter and her heirs, he was of a free, frank nature, and more inclined to sympathise with Arthur and Pauline in their resolute determination to choose for themselves, than with Celia Wynne, whom he began to suspect of misleading him.

He bore Sir Jenkyn no ill-will until he suspected him of coming between Arthur and Pauline. Indeed he had hitherto regarded him as a downright good fellow, worthy of his name and his long pedigree; and had been well pleased to greet him in

the hunting-field, or at his own board where the young baronet's father had of old been won't to take his place, as ready to hold a long controversy over *Gwillim* as to propose a toast, or troll out a Welshman's song in the vernacular.

Whatever Sir Madoc might think with regard to Sir Jenkyn, Mrs. Wynne had no mind to have a mantua-maker's apprentice for a daughter-in-law; and when after her son's departure she condescendingly bent her head and smiled at Muriel in passing, at the baths, there was anything but friendliness under the mask.

The following day she ordered Owen to stop her chair as they approached Miss D'Anyer, and without a word of apology for previous neglect, beyond an insinuation that it was her son's fault, expressed a hope that her health was improving, that she enjoyed the change, and the air, and a few like commonplaces, but this always when Muriel was *alone*.

And so day by day until the strangeness

wore off, occasionally introducing the name of her son ; and then bit by bit, in the most natural way possible, first dropping hints and then speaking openly of his long engagement to his cousin, Miss Wynne, of the Plas, and their contemplated marriage the ensuing spring, accompanied by the patronizing regret that Miss D'Anyer would not be in Chester to embroider the bridal robes, and a hope that Arthur would have sown his wild oats before then.

But never, by any chance, did she by word or look give a sign of knowledge of any pretensions that son might have had to the young girl whose heart she smote so ruthlessly.

These casual words were as the drops that wear the stone; but marble is not easily impressed, and Muriel had a steadfast mind, a clear perception, and a good memory. It goes without telling, that these suggestive insinuations that Lieutenant Wynne was playing a double game, amusing himself at her expense as a part of his wild-oat sowing,

coming from his own mother must have disturbed and disquieted Muriel, but the clear-eyed, truthful girl saw through the scheming woman, and held fast to her faith in the absent one.

Unveiled in that one painful interview in Mrs. Hopley's show-room, it was in vain for Mrs. Wynne to wear a mask before her now.

Between Pauline, Sir Madoc, and Muriel, the poor painted butterfly in the invalid chair had her head and hands full; to say nothing of her sufferings from the presumption of Owen, her maid, whom she had long decided on dismissing –when she could replace her, and, only half satisfied with her own cleverness in convincing "that artful baggage of a D'Anyer girl," she contemplated the condescending patronage of Mrs. D'Anyer. whose ears might be a trifle more accessible.

But she had the habit of talking to herself in her dressing-room when alone, or with her maid, which was pretty much the same thing, or she thought so; and Owen, stolid as she might seem, having a better heart than her

mistress, had more than once defeated her schemes, quietly and unsuspectedly. Nay, her "presumption" consisted in disapprobation open or tacit.

Old servants who have private or family affairs and secrets in their ken, are apt to presume; and the taciturn maid who held the key to all Mrs. Wynne's little flirtations, and could have thrown a light upon the duel which might have left the lady a widow, was sufficiently human to let her silence be felt, and to turn it to good uses. And however much Mrs. Wynne might mutter and grumble, the maid kept her place, and the mistress stood in some awe of her stolid imperturbable maid.

Now Owen remembered kindly the little maiden who had saved her own limbs in waiting on her wearisome mistress at the Forest House. She loved "Master Arthur," and could not stand beside the wheeled chair which Norris propelled, and hear him slandered. She knew of no "wild oats."

So one day she secretly slipped a scrap of

paper into Muriel's hand, on which was written, "Don't you believe one word against Master Arthur, he is good and true. Her doesn't know what her's saying. Illness turns some folk's heads. Don't let your mother come anigh she."

A grateful look of thanks went straight from the soft brown eyes to Owen's heart, across the fantastic gauze bonnet on the immovable head in the chair, and Muriel's low "I don't," murmured in the woman's ear as she took leave, was answered with a satisfied little nod unseen by the mistress, who had no power to turn round.

Mrs. D'Anyer had left her rheumatism in the baths, and was contemplating a return home in a couple of days, when the Wynnes, and all Buxton with them, had a sort of electric shock.

Diplomacy was defeated.

Sir Madoc was punctilious over his appearance at the breakfast-table, when gout or over-fatigue the previous day did not confine him to his pillow Mrs. Wynne

always took her coffee or chocolate in bed.

On one occasion, Miss Wynne lazily intimated overnight her intention to follow their example the following morning, protesting, that she was so fatigued, she thought she should sleep till noon; and was not to be disturbed until she rang her bell.

This was on the evening of a day on which she had drawn her father, nothing loth, to join the Derbyshire hunt, in spite of his years. Whether he had counted on the possibility or not, Sir Jenkyn was also in the field, a very centaur on his high-mettled bay; and once amongst the scarlet-coated huntsmen he had found it impossible to keep his spirited daughter and her equally spirited admirer apart.

They raced ahead keeping well together, and leaving the heavier old gentleman to follow with the stragglers; and the old sportsman more admired their daring and spirit than resented it.

Indeed, as he lay resting his weary limbs

in bed the next morning, he thought what a fine-looking pair they would make, and how much more pleasant it would be to have a son-in-law within hail, than marching after the fife and drum, and being sent to some outlandish place to be carried off by yellow fever or a bullet; to say nothing of Pauline's liking. He had really got tired of galloping after her up hill and down dale, day after day as she had kept him of late; she positively ought to have a husband to look after her. He thought he should "call back the banished Sir Jenkyn, and hand her over to *his* guardianship, and a fig for Celia and her schemes."

Elate and beaming with his benign intention, clean-shaven Sir Madoc sallied from his chamber an hour before noon, dressed with precision, not a speck on his broad-tailed bottle-green coat; his lace cravat and ruffles in perfect order; his shoe and knee-buckles bright as his own eyes; his wig carefully powdered; the broad brim of his laced hat buttoned up into its three

cocks, and he fully equipped with snuff-box, and gold-mounted stick.

Mrs. Wynne had not yet made her appearance, neither had Pauline; at least she was not in the drawing-room.

He had no particular desire to see the former; but his daughter, where was she?

Inquiry elicited from the housekeeper, that Miss Wynne had taken breakfast at a very early hour in her own room, and afterwards gone out in her riding habit unattended.

Sir Madoc stood aghast. What freak was this?

"Unattended, and in her riding-habit!" he exclaimed. "And at what hour?"

"Yes, Sir Matoc. Half-past seven, sir, or it might pe eight!" answered David.

Sir Madoc paced the room from end to end, his perturbation growing with every step, and having no counsellor at hand, took counsel with his snuff-box; but ten minutes, twenty, half-an-hour went by, and still Pauline did not return.

Norris was summoned and questioned, and then Owen. No one knew more than he had been told already.

A message went to Mrs. Wynne, and put her in a terrible flutter; then Sir Madoc took a long and vain survey of Stanecliff from the windows; then betook himself to the public stables with a vague fear of that which he would not shape into words even to himself, lest his should wrong the proud blood of the Wynnes; the blood which was chafing and boiling in his own breast, at the bare suggestion of that which he dared not name.

As he surmised, Sir Jenkyn's horse was gone, and gone too was that of Pauline. The question was—whither?

All Sir Madoc's benignity was at an end; he fumed and spluttered, ordered out his own mare intending to go in pursuit, countermanded the order, and made himself a mark for the sly shafts of grooms and underlings, with his explosive questionings.

Had Mrs. Wynne been at his elbow she

would have said, "Don't make yourself ridiculous, and Pauline generally conspicuous. You want tact, Sir Madoc."

Something like it she did say when he went back to the Crescent, with a doubtful sort of hope that there he might find the absentee.

"It is my daughter I want, madam! Can you tell me where I shall find *her!* Don't talk of tact and self-control to me, I say, unless you can."

"Now, my dear Sir Madoc, pray be calm, how can I tell where the dear girl has flown? You cannot think Pauline would do anything rash?" half expostulated, half whimpered the tremulous creature, huddled up in a rocquelaire, with her curls and cap in a very unwonted state of disarray.

Pausing in his restless walk, and mechanically dipping his finger and thumb into the snuff-box he had nearly emptied in his excitement, he confronted her with, "Calm, madam, calm;" he snapped down the lid of the box and rapped it smartly with his

knuckles, "I say, how calm do you expect a man to be, whose daughter has been so rash as to run off with a man she might have had with her father's blessing if she had but waited another day."

"Sir Madoc! You cannot mean it!"

"Yes! I do mean it. But *now*, look you, unless Pauline be here within the hour, I'll cast her off, disinherit her; she shall be no child of mine."

But the hour struck, and another, and still there was no sign of either Pauline or Sir Jenkyn.

Sir Madoc was again at the stables. His previous excited enquiries had set tongues wagging. His reappearance was the signal for fresh comments and suggestions, all pointing to suspicions of a runaway match.

A hunting friend of Sir Jenkyn's suggested "Gretna Green," a groom interposed with a grin, "Neay, they moight get th' job done gradely nigher-hant than Gratna Green. They ha' on'y to go to th' church i'th' Peak Forest to get wed wi'hout axins or owt."

A bystander confirmed this. "Aye, all the runaways go to the Peak Forest Church to be wed. You see, it's what they call extra-parochial, and has some sort of law of its own."

Then the keeper of the stables recollected that Sir Jenkyn had been asking overnight for a guide who knew the country well; someone else had seen him in conversation with one of the hangers-on about the place, a fellow named Blackburn, whose character was none of the best—and the man was missing that morning.

There was no dearth of rough-riding volunteers for the quest now there was a clue, or of guides, and Sir Madoc rode like one possessed. All his kindly intentions had turned to bitterness and exasperation; and his anger intensified with every mile of rough road that shook him in his saddle.

Once at the little hamlet in the heart of the Peak Forest, the simple parson did not need much seeking. He was found in his shirt sleeves tilling the patch of ground he called

his garden. They soon knew all he or the villagers had to tell.

Yes, Pauline Wynne, and Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, had been to the secluded church. Had left it man and wife. There was an ill-looking fellow with them who had held their horses. They were going back to Buxton through Tideswell, their guide had told a lad.

Told to mislead. A woman they met where the road branched off had seen them strike northward, as if toward Eldon Hole. Two miners had watched them a little beyond that awful chasm with their faces set towards Castleton, and had "wished them well through the Winnats with that fow chap in company."

And here it should be told that the Winnats or Windgates is a narrow, winding, and still descending pass, which constitutes about the last mile of road from Chapel-in-le-Frith towards Castleton, the ancient stronghold of the Peverels. There the cramped up winds rush and tear along with terrific violence only such stony barriers could withstand; and

there, with their heads shrouded in perpetual fog, precipices a thousand feet high frown at each other, and seem to lock the traveller in. Only necessity or the familiarity of common use could reconcile the lonely traveller to such a route; even to the adventurous tourist the horror of the place made the first view of the vale of Castleton a welcome relief from morbid oppression.

Yet, late in the afternoon, among the windings of that craggy and repulsively lonely pass of the Windgates, to the shuddering dismay of the seekers, they were found, the bridegroom and bride—despoiled of all that was valuable, cut and bruised, left with just enough life to fold each other in close embrace and await death—or the miracle of discovery.

A shout from the leaders had told Sir Madoc they were found. The *how* drove the old man speechless and aghast. There was an effort made to keep him back but he would press to the front. And then he was frantic.

Brandy-flasks were ready, and handkerchiefs to bind up wounds; coats were freely doffed to shield them from the evening breeze, which there became a blast, for they had been ruthlessly stripped of outer coverings; and horsemen sped on under the frowning crags to spread the alarm and bring assistance.

Helpless and half-insensible, Pauline and her husband were both lifted carefully by strong hands to friendly saddles, and the doubly burdened beasts picked their way in the waning light down the steep and rough descent to Castleton.

And, oh, the agony of that hour to good Sir Madoc! Wrath had given place to anguish and regret, and loud as had been his bitter denunciations of the headstrong pair, his voice now sank into lamentation and remorse, not unchequered by execrations of Celia Wynne's policy, to which he attributed this catastrophe.

"Had not she blinded me this would never have been. Oh, Pauline, my child, my child!"

So lamenting the grey-haired old baronet kept close beside the stout horseman who had charge of his helpless daughter, ever and anon stretching out his hand to grasp hers and ascertain if warmth and pulsation were there; the hand from which even the new wedding ring had disappeared.

In such wise did the sad procession seek the open door of the humble inn at Castleton, where the motherly hostess was already prepared to receive them, with the village doctor by her side.

They did not die; though at the time the D'Anyers left Buxton, life and death wavered in the balance, and rumour said recovery was impossible, they had been so wofully maltreated. But even then Sir Jenkyn had rallied to tell how they had followed their guide without suspicion into the rocky pass, until a comrade lying in wait had sprung upon them unawares, and ere he could draw a pistol had struck him with a bludgeon from his seat. Of the after-struggle, indicated by the stained and trampled

ground, he remembered nothing, nor did his unhappy bride.

Highway robbery and horse-stealing were hanging matters in those days, even when murder was not attempted, and these two had certainly been left for dead. Justice was already on the track of the ruffians, stimulated no less by the reward offered by Sir Madoc Wynne, than by the blood-money paid by the Crown to the thief-taker on conviction.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG HEADS AND OLD ONES.

"WHY, Ellen, Buxton has made a new woman of thee, and of Muriel too!" was Mrs. Bancroft's opening salutation when they paid the latter a visit on their return home, Mrs. D'Anyer almost as nimble as her daughter.

They had called on Lydia by the way, and had so timed their arrival at Red Bank as not either to interrupt business, or disconcert Margery by a needless re-arrangement of the afternoon tea-table.

When alone, Sarah Bancroft had her tea set on a small round snap-table in the big, bright, best kitchen, winter and summer; but Margery knew well that visitors meant privacy and tea in the sitting-room; the room so little occupied otherwise since

Samuel had made a home for himself elsewhere. The best parlour, on the other side the hall, was reserved for state occasions, and it might be, to find occupation for Margery and her polishing brushes.

Their entrance was the signal for Margery to bring a long brimstone-tipped match alight into the room, and place it beneath the turf and coal already in the bright grate, in order to kindle up a fire, using her check apron as a fan to expedite the process. But no sooner had she carried her linsey petticoat, and blue bed-gown (a loose jacket) and white linen mutch out of the apartment, and a faint cup-and-saucer sound was heard from the kitchen, than Mrs. Bancroft, whose first greetings and hand-shakings were over—kissing was not universal then amongst women, and she was not one to invite such familiarity even from her own near kin—and who sat down on her high-backed arm-chair watching her daughter disrobe, began abruptly, to Muriel's alarm:

"What's this I hear about Lieutenant Wynne? Joe Bent says he was hanging

about Muriel all the while he was with you, and gave no one else a chance of edging in a word. I hope, Ellen, thah has not been encouraging the young officer to come after Muriel, or Muriel either,"—and she spoke with some acerbity.

"And why not?" asked Mrs. D'Anyer, with half timid but very genuine surprise.

"Why not? Ask Muriel. She knows why not. Are not we all tradespeople? Such as he don't mate with manufacturers," and she pushed back her grey hair under her mob-cap with an impatient gesture.

"So I told him, grandmother; but——"

"That's a sensible lass," interrupted the old dame. "I'm glad thah remembered my advice," and she patted the "sensible lass" on the shoulder.

"Yes; but, grandmother," began Muriel again, "he would not listen to me, and he is going to write to you, and I have promised ——"

"*Promised!* not to marry him, surely?" and again the furrowed brow clouded.

"Not without your consent, and that of his own friends."

"Good lass! good lass! I wish all young folk were as wise,"—a dab at Ellen D'Anyer, which drew forth a heavy sigh from that quarter. "But I hope thy fine lover hasn't made thee too proud to go back to Chester with me next week. And I hope thah can ride outside the coach through Frodsham without fancying thah's a right to every rood of land we traverse, because it belonged to the dead-and-gone D'Anyers hundreds of years back, like that silly father of thine. We had a battle-royal over it the other week, and I told him that Muriel's needle he was so much ashamed of, would be like to do him more service than the lance of the best of the D'Anyers he was bragging about. Such paltry pride!"

Muriel, carrying off her mother's bonnet and cloak, had escaped this latter ejaculation with all its accompaniment of infinite scorn; and her mother having diverted conversation to the terrible catastrophe which had fallen

on the Wynnes, she re-entered the parlour, a fresh-looking, comely maiden in a dark blue figured-stuff gown, with lace frills to cover elbows and neck, just as her grandmother was saying, "Blackburn, Blackburn! I wonder if that's one of Maggy Blackburn's lads. They're a bad lot; not a bit too good for aught. I only wonder Lydia likes to have the woman about her, however good a nurse she may be. They were suspected of mauling the captain's servant, Norris, I remember. I'll go and ask Sam what he thinks. He's not left the counting-house yet. It's a busy time with us, as thah knows."

Whatever Sam thought, he was evidently startled; but he put his change of colour down to the "shocking affair," and set down as "preposterous the notion that because Maggy Blackburn's lads were a bit wild, and did a little poaching now and then, they should be suspected of anything worse." And as poaching and smuggling were winked at, and connived in by well-to-do and respectable people, the excuse passed muster;

especially when backed by the query why the Cheshire man should be found in Derbyshire?

If it was anything more than an excuse Sam diverted attention by closing the ledger and hurrying out of the counting-house to welcome and congratulate the visitors on their good looks, and to heighten Muriel's colour by jocular reference to the "fancy sweetheart she had found."

But though Margery had brought in besides the mahogany tea-board with its array of blue-and-white china, a pile of those hot well-buttered potato cakes in which his palate delighted, he declined to take tea with them, said Lydia was not well, and would be expecting him; and he must be back before the men had finished their baggin'.*

"Was Lydia ill?" asked his mother curiously, when he was gone, "I think you said you had called there."

"She did not say so," was Ellen D'Anyer's

* Baggin', the food a Lancashire operative carried with him in a bag, for refreshment at certain breaks in the long hours of labour.

response, "she looked low-spirited and weary, but nothing more than usual."

"Um!" was all the comment of the querist. Mrs. D'Anyer went on, "I think she works too hard. Go when you will everything is in order, and so bright and clean you might almost eat off the floors and tables; and no litter, not even the child's doll about. She had just dressed herself for the afternoon, and was making a pinafore. I asked her why she did not come and see us sometimes, and she told me she could not leave the house, Sam would not like it. There were so many rough people hanging about Hyde's Cross, and the market, they might be robbed. Then I asked if she did not feel lonely, so much by herself; and why she did not have a servant woman. And I fancy she did not like my questions, for she answered—what do you think? 'Hard work was the best cure for loneliness; she had not been brought up a lady, and Sam *could not afford to keep a servant.*'"

"*Sam not afford !*" echoed the old woman with a jerk which shook the frills of her cap. "*Sam not afford?*" She was incredulous.

"I don't think Aunt Lydia would say it if Uncle Sam did not tell her so," put in Muriel. "When little Lydia was a baby I heard her wish she had the farm dairy and gardens to go to, everything cost so much to buy."

"Hm! She's a saving body is Lydia; would rather save her money than her bones. She has none of the wants and ways of gentility. And so long as Sam never takes his own friends or customers into the house, I suppose he lets her have her own way. I don't blame her or him for being thrifty. It's best for young beginners—some folk start wrong end first; (this was another dab at the D'Anyers) but I'll ne'er believe *Sam* told her he could not afford to keep a maid. It would be a *lie !*"

And as if her set face and stern tone were not sufficiently emphatic she struck the table with a force which made the cups and saucers rattle; and caused Muriel to rise

disquieted, and say she would go to the Hargreaves' for half-an-hour, she wished to see Milly.

Mrs. D'Anyer, equally disconcerted, willingly assented, and just to divert the current of conversation gave Muriel a message to deliver. But the train of her own thought was, "How soon mother fires up if a word is said against Sam. True as steel she thinks him; and she would neither thank me nor anyone else to show her the rust on the blade."

She little imagined that her mother's very vehemence was the outcome of shadowy suspicions, against which she was fighting and protesting with all the strength of maternal idolatry.

She saw her turn her chair to front the fire, now bright and glowing, and sit silent, looking into it, and brooding, with set brows and close mouth, running her hand mechanically up and down the bright steel chain by which her keys were suspended from her girdle, and whilst puzzling what had come

over her mother she was too timid to break the silence.

Presently to her relief, in came Margery for the tea-board, unsummoned, and said, "Missis, yo're wanted i' th' warehouse."

The magical word broke the reverie and called the business woman to her feet. "Aye, aye, Margery, I know I'm wanted. These are not times to sit dawdling by the fire."

"Then I'll say good afternoon, mother," said Ellen, quick to take the hint, "I'll go round by the works to meet Muriel, as you are busy."

"Aye, aye, so thah'd best. And see the lass's things are packed betimes. Good day."

Mrs. D'Anyer met Muriel at the entrance of the dyer's croft where long pieces of blue and red calico hung from tenter-hook to tenter-hook by the self-edges to drain and dry in a wavy succession of short lines between post and post.

They were equally surprised to meet.

"Why did you leave grandmother?" asked the one.

"Was not Milly at home?" questioned the other.

"Oh, mother was busy, and I thought I was not wanted." Questions and answers were simultaneous.

"Yes! Milly was at home but—" and Muriel hesitated for she hardly knew how to answer—"but we had a little difference and I thought I had better come away before it became a great one."

"Quite right, my dear, always avoid quarrelling if possible. But I should scarcely have expected Milly to be disagreeable with *you*. Her love for you has been so earnest."

"She was not exactly disagreeable, mother, but we had a difference of opinion; and she wanted me——well perhaps it was no great matter after all, and she may forget it by the morrow."

Ellen D'Anyer asked no questions, and the subject dropped. It occurred to her

that Milly had been intrusively inquisitive about Joe Bent and Lieutenant Wynne, that Muriel had not felt disposed to answer, and that Milly had been petulant.

Her surmise was correct in part, but only in part. Milly had welcomed Muriel with more than ordinary effusion. She had seen her coming and rushed to meet her with open arms, clasped her in a close embrace, laughed, yet seemed half inclined to cry, and almost dragged her into the house and up the stairs to her own bedroom in her haste to have her all to herself.

It was a pleasant room, overlooking the croft, and the shining Irk, and the flowery uplands beyond the river which her father and his confraternity were doing their best to spoil with refuse from the vats. Courtly shepherds and shepherdesses made perpetual love in bowers of marvellous exotics on the printed linen curtains of her four-post-bed, on which lay a snowy counterpane of her dead mother's knitting; so no wonder love-

making occupied the damsel's dreams by day and by night.

"Oh, Muriel I have so wanted you!" she cried, "I am so glad you have come. Father's in the parlour shut up with old Stott, with their pipes and ale, hatching mischief I know. And now take off your things, and tell me all the news." And she laid hands on the clasp of her cousin's cloak.

Muriel checked her. "No, Milly, I cannot stay long. Mother is waiting for me at Grandmother Bancroft's!"

"Oh, never mind them. They won't want you. Let them have their talk, and we'll have ours. I declare, you *are* looking well! I suppose that is due to your new sweetheart more than to Buxton or its springs. Ah! I see it's all true by your colour. Joe Bent came home in a fine taking. I've not seen him, Bob told me." And now it was not only Muriel who blushed.

Milly's colour seemed to deepen strangely.

"I think Joe has made himself unneces-

sarily communicative, and has said more than he had any right to say—but perhaps I am mistaken, what *did* Joe say?"

It flashed across Muriel's mind that perhaps Milly referred to Joe himself only, and she seated herself quietly in a rush-bottomed chair by the dimity-draped dressing-table whilst Milly leaned against it, her handsome face reflected in the small shield-shaped looking-glass thereon.

"Oh, Joe said he found Lieutenant Wynne dangling after you, keeping you all to himself, and looking as if he would cut any other fellow's throat who so much as looked at you. Bob says it was all Joe's jealousy, and that if the officer had not been in the way, Joe had meant to make you an offer himself; and how delightful that would have been!"

"Would it?" said Muriel abstractedly, her thoughts flying from the problematic to the actual "offer" made by Joe; but seeing that Joe had kept his own counsel, even from his brother, she was not the one to betray it. Indeed she knew that Joe possessed sterling

qualities under his blunt exterior, and she held him in too much esteem to make his honest proposal a subject for chit-chat, however confidential, although she had been compelled to reject him.

Her brief "Would it?" appeared to tantalize Milly, who seemed in a most excitable mood, she answered so quickly, "Of course it would. Don't you think it would be pleasanter to have you for a sister-in-law, than have you carried off no one knows where, to live in barracks, or camps, or all sorts of horrible places. But you have not told me anything about Lieutenant Wynne yet. Where did you meet him? What did he say? Is he in love with you? Did he ask you to have him?" and she bent forward eagerly huddling her questions one on another, and gathering half answers from Muriel's changing countenance.

"How provoking you are! Do tell me something, and then perhaps I'll tell you something. I'm dying with curiosity!"

Muriel laughed. "I think you will

survive; but you take one's breath away, and give one no chance to speak. Besides I fancy you have more to tell than I have—as yet. What do you mean by sisters-in-law? Has Robert won his father and yours over?"

"Hush-sh!" Milly stole to the door on tip-toe, opened it gently, listened at the staircase head, then came in and closed it mysteriously. "Hush!" she whispered, "I don't want father to know!"

"Know what?"

"Well, Muriel, I am dying to tell you, for I really do want your help and advice; I've no one to speak to but you; and oh, I do want a friend!"

Muriel grew alarmed. "What is the matter, Milly? anything your father ought to know?"

"Oh, nothing's the matter, at least—Oh, Muriel, you will promise not to mention it to anyone but Bob, if I tell you a great secret?" and she looked as if bursting with some news she longed to communicate.

"I cannot promise that, Milly. I do not

care to have secrets. If it is anything I ought to know and you tell me, trusting my discretion to keep the secret, you can do so. But I cannot make a blind promise and burden my conscience with a secret I might feel it my duty to reveal."

"Oh, Muriel, Muriel, don't be so prim and particular. It is nothing so very dreadful. And you might make the promise. I know you would be sure to keep it if you did," and Milly dropped on her knees before her cousin in earnest entreaty.

Muriel put her arms round her impulsive cousin's neck.

"My dear Milly," said she, "I would do anything to promote your happiness, if I saw how to do it clearly and fairly. But if this secret be something your father may not know, then I would rather not know it; and if it is anything concerning Bob Bent, I think my uncle is the first person to be told."

Milly rose to her feet in alarm. "You won't tell father what I have said? If you

do—" and she seemed to tremble with apprehension.

"Certainly not, Milly; it would be a breach of confidence. But pray do not ask me to do more. It troubles me to see you so agitated, for I feel as if there was something afoot, in which your father ought to be consulted; seeing that you have no mother to confide in. Robert is too much in love to be a safe guide, at least about anything that concerns you matrimonially. Don't let him lead you away to do or say anything you may repent. I'm afraid he is pressing you to marry him. But, my dear, you are both very young. Why not wait?"

"Wait, indeed! and old Stott closeted with father even now. It's not about carrying, I know, unless it's carrying me off, and he's twenty years older than I am, if he's a day. I hate the sight of him. He's had one wife, and that might content him; and if he wants another, surely there are plenty of women in Yorkshire without coming here for one. And where he's not wanted.—But, oh,

Muriel, you might promise to keep my secret if I told you."

Muriel was steadfast. She shook her head. "I can't, Milly, I can't!"

"Can't, indeed! You might if you would!" and Milly fired up, "it's easy to see what your hollow friendship is worth. You're growing as hard and as cold as your Grandmother Bancroft, that you are! But you wouldn't be so particular and conscientious if it was your own case, I know."

Muriel rose. She was not inclined to say how nearly it had been her case, or how she had answered an impulsive lover. She made excuses for her cousin, even whilst she felt the injustice of her reproaches. All she said was, "You will think differently when you are more composed, and reflect. And I hope you will come and see me before I go back to Chester;" and opening the door, she left Milly to cool down.

"Ah," cried Milly, as she went, "Muriel would *not* be so calm if it were her case. And she has gone without telling me one

word about the lieutenant. She surely would have told me if he had said anything particular. But there's no knowing those quiet people; they think so much more than they say. Oh, dear, dear; I wish she would have promised."

Yes, the quiet person had thought more than was shown. During her long probation at school, and at Mrs. Hopley's she had learned to hide her emotions, nay as a very child, when the pain of her father's visible dislike was not to be told even to her mother. And now she was full of distress as she left the dye-works, and took her way between the long lines of swinging hanks of coloured yarn, and flapping folds of ingrain calicoes. She had never had a difference with her cousin before, and now she thought "What could have made Milly so curious and excitable? She said I was hard and cold as Grandmother Bancroft? But surely she has never found me hard; and I do not think my grandmother is really hard, if we did but know. She was tender enough to me when I

was ill at school. I suppose people always seem hard when they think for themselves and do not agree with others; Milly could not mean what she said. She knows I love her dearly, but she may be inclined to do something foolish; and I was afraid to make so blind a promise. If there be anything she really desires me to know she will be sure to come and tell me, and then I can help her, or advise as well as I am able. Poor girl, she sadly wants a mother. I hope Robert has not tempted her to marry him in secret. It would exasperate the old people I am sure. I will ask her when she comes. It was something about Robert, I am certain. But hard—hard, does Arthur think me hard *now?* He said I was hard, when I was only striving to do right. Perhaps he may, for I could not express a tithe of my love for him, and I did not dare with all so uncertain." And here her mother came in sight across the fallow fields.

Joe Bent did not show himself in Broom Street, but Robert did, and so did Milly

Hargreaves. But Milly's manner was constrained. To Muriel's anxious question if she had been privately married to Bob she gave a curt "No!" but the great secret remained a secret; even from Muriel.

No letter from Lieutenant Wynne had come to either Mrs. Bancroft or Mr. D'Anyer when Muriel went back to Chester, and Muriel's friends were disposed to think him a trifler. But when she was once more in the work-room, and the fair was at its height, Captain Arthur Wynne walked into the Manchester Hall, where Mrs. Bancroft was buying, selling, and bartering her furry wares on a large scale; and John D'Anyer as erect as if he too wore a military stock, was doing the latter with fustians and small-wares to shopkeepers and other dealers, Irish, Welsh, and English too.

The young officer had already got his company, and was then stationed in Chester as a sub-district for active recruiting. And there being no longer a question of his freedom to marry, he thought he might as

well reconnoitre, and ascertain what Muriel's relations were like in their business hours before he sought a private interview with either; not that there was the slightest doubt or wavering in his mind with regard to her.

He did not overlook her position in Mrs. Hopley's work-room, was not blind to the social drawback it might prove to Muriel herself; but he loved her with a fervour and devotion which set all other considerations aside, and was only eager to make her his own as the supreme blessing of his life. Perhaps he thought his wife would be carried so far out of her own sphere, there was little danger of clashing with her connections afterwards.

With all his impatience and eagerness he had forborne to intrude on his beloved, lest he should do her an unintentional wrong; and before seeking the sanction of relatives, thought it well to scan his ground.

"A fine figure, looks every inch a gentleman," was his mental comment on Muriel's white-headed father, as he strolled round the

central area of the hall, less conspicuous than might have been, since so many peaceful traders had donned the uniform of war. "He looks as lordly over the selling of his goods, as if he were marshalling a troop of soldiers. Fortune certainly made a blunder when she set him amongst such merchandise. And what a beau he is! Ah, and there is the good owner of the silver whistle. What a contrast! As blunt and homely as he is polished. She looks more than the eight years older since we met in Delamere." And so ran Arthur Wynne's cogitations as he mingled amongst the busy stream of buyers, a casual spectator only; unrecognized because in the one case unknown, in the other, forgotten.

He was glad to escape from that Hall of Commerce, where the babel of tongues, the jargon of trade, the mingled odours of various merchandise fell all unpleasantly on his senses. And it spoke well for his steadfast devotion to Muriel, that his sentiments and intentions underwent no change, so little

in unison with his preconceived ideas of respectability was this bargaining and chaffering over goods on a counter. He saw piles of heavy broad goods, heaps of small-wares papered up, but the cabalistic technicalities of the mart were as strange to him as military standing-orders would have been to the merchants, and he could scarcely draw the distinction between the sales effected there with other dealers, and the after retail trade over the shopkeeper's counter.

Things are managed differently now, but then there were no cotton-lords, nor many merchant-princes, and the manufacturer did not disdain to be his own salesman; the gap between the trading community and that aristocratic section which officered our army, was wide; though innovation was slowly creeping in, and the scions of noble houses were being uncomfortably elbowed in the mess-room and on parade by brother officers whose commissions were purchased by money made in trade.

Later in the day the captain's servant carried two notes into the Manchester Hall, the result being, firstly an interview that evening with Mr. D'Anyer at the Plume of Feathers, and another later with Mrs. Bancroft at the Yacht Inn, though privacy at fair-time was scarcely obtainable.

He had much less difficulty with the father than with the grandmother, the former being so thoroughly imbued, not to say inflated, with his own renowned ancestry as to see neither condescension nor incongruity in Captain Wynne's overtures for his daughter's hand, but only a rightful recognition of her ancient lineage, the little accident of her apprenticeship notwithstanding.

"Your discernment does you credit, Captain," said he, as they discussed the matter over a choice bottle of port. "*My* daughter comes of a good stock; there are fair lands in this county over which the D'Anyers once held sway, and if Frodsham and Lyme passed away lang syne through a

female branch, and Muriel will bring you no rood of land, she will bring a heritage of pure blood and unstained integrity. The Wynnes—fill your glass, Captain, no heel-taps —the Wynnes may be proud to claim alliance with so fair a specimen of the D'Anyers, though her immediate progenitors be only fustian and beggars'-inkle* weavers," and the manufacturer of beggars'-inkle drew himself up as loftily as if he had worn a casque and plume.

A smile flickered on the young man's lips; but he had noted the implied consent, and taking no heed of the family pride, which at another time might have amused him, answered, "I am not a rich man myself, sir; I have little beyond my pay; what I may be in the future, is not for me to think of; valued lives, which I hope may be long ones, come between me and natural inheritance, and I seek neither lands nor wealth with Miss D'Anyer, but only her own rich self. I

* Beggars'-inkle was the commonest kind of tape, such as cooks bound round fillets of veal and rounds of beef.

may have seen fairer, I have seen richer women according to the world's estimate, but I have seen none so fully endowed with the graces and riches that will neither fade nor flee; and certainly no lovelier eyes, no sweeter countenance ever beamed upon mortal man. Her unsophisticated excellences charmed me in the child, their development has enthralled and enchained me in these riper years."

John D'Anyer filled his glass and drained it; he had never fully appreciated his eldest girl. "Um, ah, yes," he said cogitatively, smacking his lips over the new flavour of Muriel's praises, rather than the old flavour of the vintage; then launching out into rhapsodies which outdid those of the lover, though he had only discovered the value of the family gem when Captain Wynne proposed for it a new setting.

The young man listened, nothing loth, to parental anecdotes and encomiums of his beloved; but time was flying, he was no wine-bibber, and Mrs. Bancroft had yet to

be seen. He took advantage of a momentary pause over a re-filled glass to say,—

"Then, Mr. D'Anyer, as I presume I have your consent, I would ask how soon I may claim its ratification. It was my desire to make Miss D'Anyer my wife in time to free her from bondage to that woman in Watergate Street"—he never spoke over-respectfully of Mrs. Hopley—"but the dear girl absolutely refused. I hope——"

What he hoped was interrupted by John D'Anyer, who, pulling himself up to his full height, exclaimed,—

"And what could you expect, sir, but an absolute refusal from *my* daughter! If that self-willed, hard-headed old grandmother of hers, who fancies because she has a few thousands to dispose of that the whole family must be under her control, and fall down and worship her,—if that foolish old woman, who fancies herself wise, did carry off our Muriel from her proper place in her own home to serve a stranger, and coerced me into acquiescence; it shall never be said that

John D'Anyer connived at breaking a bargain into which he has once entered, however bad a bargain he may find it. My honour, sir," and he struck his breast, "forbids me to break my bond. Twelve months hence you have my consent to claim my daughter, until then she must remain where she is."

"But, sir,——"

"But! there is no 'but' in the case, Captain. If you are not inclined to bide the conditions, I retract my consent. The man who is not willing to wait for my daughter, sir, is not worthy to possess my daughter, sir. Good heavens! you don't suppose you are the only suitor for my daughter's hand? If you will not wait, there are others who will, my——"

Arthur Wynne hastened to assure him that he accepted his terms, hard as they were, rather than risk the withdrawal of his favour; and after a few more words of conciliation to the man who had so suddenly become aware of "my daughter's" worth, he shook hands and took leave, in haste to

keep his other appointment. Not, it must be confessed, without some inward qualms. It was no easy task to assume composure whilst in a state of feverish excitement; and his remembrance of the threatened rupture between Muriel's grandmother and the Kingsleys did not suggest the fittest auditor of a love story.

"I protest I could go into battle with more nerve than meet this formidable old dame," he murmured to himself, as he shouldered his way into the Yacht, and enquired for the furrier from the host.

Mrs. Bancroft had secured a quiet nook for their conference, though it was little larger than a closet. Conciliated by the young man's deference to his elders, she greeted him cordially, and inquired after the Major and Mrs. Wynne, and so far put the young captain at his ease. But he soon found he had a strong and independent will to deal with. She did not beat about the bush, and she was much more practical than her son-in-law.

"And so you want to marry my grand-

daughter Muriel? Well, I liked you when you were a lad, and I don't dislike you now, but I do dislike your trade. There have been nothing but wars and rumours of wars for years upon years, till my old head is ready to split with the squeak of the fife and the bang of the drum. Every lad in Manchester that can handle a musket flings off his working gear to play at soldiering, and poor women and children and peaceful traders are the sufferers. And I don't like unequal matches; and however John D'Anyer may boast of his blue blood, and his pedigree, the match would be unequal."

"Oh, Mrs. Bancroft," he began—she held up her thin brown hand to silence him.

"I say it *would* be unequal; you are the heir of the Wynnes, and your lady-mother would be sure to cast up to my grandchild that Muriel had made dresses for herself and her fine friends." Her keen eyes saw him wince. "Aye, you know that is true,—aye, and though I intend Muriel to have three hundred a year from the day she marries, if she marries

to my liking, belike my lady would hold her nose at the money because it came out of my skin-sheds. And I'd rather Muriel had set her mind on a plain tradesman's son, one not too proud to take my share of the business off my hands and go into partnership with my son Sam, when I throw up the reins. But there's no controlling young folks' likings, and I've a notion the lass had set her mind on you long before she knew it herself."

Arthur Wynne brightened: this seemed more promising.

"I know I loved *her* before *I* was conscious of it," he put in, eagerly.

Without noting the interruption she went on, "Now, I dare say you wonder why, being able and willing to give Muriel a wedding portion, I should bind her to Mrs. Hopley. Do you think I wanted to make a mantua-maker of the lass?—nought o' th' sort, though where there are three or four lasses in a family, a good needlewoman comes handy. But I brought her here to school, and bound her 'prentice, just because she was put upon at

home, was at everyone's beck and call, was snubbed and kept in the background, and neither her mother nor herself had the spirit to stand against it, for where John D'Anyer sets down his foot, they are ready to kiss the ground. She's good-looking enough now, and her eyes are clear as wells, and I dare say John will be proud of her *now;* but *then* he had taken a dislike to the child because illness had half-blinded her and spoiled her beauty. She came the first and was put last, and I found that she was conscious it was on account of her seamed face. Her sisters rode rough-shod over her, even when they were little ones, and John encouraged them. Many a girl would have rebelled, but Muriel was like her mother, as soft as my pocket, and would scarcely have cried out if they had knocked her down and wiped their feet upon her. But I'd no mind the willing horse should do all the work, so I said I'd see about it—and I did. I saw first that she had a good education—and none can deny that Miss Briscoe was a good teacher — and

then put her, as I thought, with a motherly woman who would treat her kindly and teach her something useful." Then after a pause, Sarah Bancroft was reluctant to confess a failure—"I'm free to own I made a mistake."

"A great one," murmured Captain Wynne under his breath, but her quick ears caught the import.

"Aye, and I'll see I don't make another. I'll make the dear lass happy if I can, but I've a notion her heart's too tender to be happy as a soldier's wife in war-time. I suppose you wouldn't like to sell out, if I——"

He interrupted her—"Sell out—at such a crisis! My dear madam, I should be scouted as a coward!"

"Ah, well, so I suppose. But there's no knowing what may happen before the year's end, and there can be no marrying before that. So come to me then either here, or at my place on Red Bank, Manchester, and I'll see what can be done then."

This was tantamount to consent, or he took it

as such, shaking hands with the old dame very gratefully as he left the inn. But he did not forget to say, "I presume there can be no objection to my meeting Miss D'Anyer occasionally whilst stationed here? The probation would be unendurable otherwise."

And her answer was, "Well--a—I'll see about it."

CHAPTER V.

MILLY'S SECRET TOLD.

A WEEK is a long time for an impatient lover to wait for a sight of his beloved when she is close at hand, and only a hard-hearted door between himself and happiness, but when that week is superadded to several other weeks of absence, the delay is irritating. It would have been more natural and satisfactory for Arthur Wynne to rush off to Muriel, and print on her lips the consent he had won from her father and grandmother, than to sit down to his desk in the barracks and pour out his heart and his tidings on paper, and long like some working-man for the Sunday which would set his sweetheart at liberty to meet him. But he had no alternative.

He sent his letter by a messenger. The

answer came back verbally. The young lady was engaged, was too busy to write. Would be with her grandmother on Sunday.

He set his teeth and paced more impatiently the Watergate Row in which he had awaited her answer. It was certainly a mortification to his pride. And it was more than that; it told how close her bonds must be, and set him longing more and more to burst them.

Yet it was strange that he, a soldier, upholding the necessity of army discipline, should so chafe at the discipline Mrs. Hopley enforced.

Mrs. Bancroft had informed him that no more Sunday work would be imposed on Muriel; she having threatened the mantua-maker with the pains and penalties of the ecclesiastical court in such case; and that on those days Muriel might be seen. She had driven Muriel over to Wrexham the previous day to visit some old friends, and the following Sunday the girl would spend with her

and her father. The captain could join them if so inclined.

Meantime the energetic old dame betook herself to Mrs. Hopley's, and a somewhat stiff interview was that between the pair. Mrs. Bancroft's previous threat yet rankled in the other's breast.

Alike careful of her grandchild's reputation, and conscious that Captain Wynne was not of the mettle to submit tamely to total separation from the maiden he sought to make his wife, she came with a proposal that Mrs. Hopley should open her doors to him at convenient seasons, it "not being fitting that her grandchild should meet her sweetheart" (the old woman clung to the good old word) "in the highways and byways."

"They don't meet under this roof," was Mrs. Hopley's decided rebuff. "Mrs. Wynne is a customer of mine and I don't choose to sacrifice her patronage by countenancing her son's courtship of my apprentice."

"If all I hear be true, it's little patronage you are likely to have again in that quarter.

There has been a quarrel between Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne, and so long as *he* lives she is not likely to cross the threshold of the Plas again. He blames her for all that has befallen his daughter; for her runaway wedding with Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, and all."

Mrs. Hopley opened her eyes and her mouth in sheer astonishment. "How did you hear this? Did the young captain tell you?"

"Not he! He's too much a gentleman to prate of his family affairs to strangers. Nay. It's the common gossip of Buxton. Folk don't quarrel in whispers be they gentle or simple. The news came to me through a customer of mine."

She did not think it needful to add that Muriel had lodged in the house of that customer, or that Arthur Wynne's visits there had caused the shopkeeper to retail the gossip.

Still Mrs. Hopley did not seem inclined to give in. She thought she had the whip hand of Mrs. Bancroft and determined to show it.

"Well, all that's no business of mine. My

respectability is. I'm not going to have military gallants hanging about my place to disgrace us. No Captain Wynne comes here to see an apprentice of mine, be she who she may."

"Suppose I give my consent to his marrying her right off, as he wants to do! Where then would you be?" put Mrs. Bancroft with a decisive nod.

Mrs. Hopley looked aghast. The whip had changed hands.

Mrs. Bancroft continued, "I had passed my word for her return, and the lass was too good to make me break it, or she might have been Mrs. Wynne now;—and then where would you have been?"

"Indeed," replied the mistress of the robes. "That alters the case. I was not aware Miss D'Anyer had been so conscientious. In that case I think she may be trusted to meet the captain—occasionally. And—and—well, he can call for her, and take her to church, and bring her back if so disposed; *occasionally*."

She was in reality glad of a ground on which to make her reluctant and not very liberal concession, without compromise of her own position since she saw in Sarah Bancroft's manner a resolve to make her words good; and Muriel was far too profitable an apprentice to be parted with, even if she had not determined to keep her in a spirit of bravado. It had dawned on her that Sir Madoc was old, and that some day Captain Wynne might reign at the Plas. It was best to be obliging.

Glad enough was Arthur Wynne for the recognition of his suit implied in that invitation to meet Muriel in the presence of her relatives; but he was scarcely so grateful to Mrs. Bancroft as he might have been for making terms with the dressmaker for the privilege of meeting his future bride. He had the grace to thank the old dame nevertheless for her good intentions, but he felt as if there had been a blow dealt at his family dignity. It was only when he looked at Muriel that he forgot it.

That meeting in the presence of their elders was embarrassing for both; and might have been more so had not John D'Anyer with mingled courtesy and good feeling contrived to set them at ease after the first greetings.

Wine and fruits were on the table and both he and Mrs. Bancroft with old-fashioned hospitality pressed their guest to partake; then John D'Anyer introduced politics, and the new volunteer service as topics of conversation; then talked of the captain's own duties in Chester, which appeared to be neither few nor light; there was the inspection, attestation and enrolment of the batches of recruits as they were brought in by the sergeants. There was mustering, and drilling, and clothing, and he was answerable for all under his command.

Then either he or Mrs. Bancroft began to speak of Buxton, and of the accidental meeting of the young officer and Muriel, and from her place on the window-seat Muriel put in a few words now and again; but Arthur, who seemed to hang upon her syllables, thought

she turned her eyes anywhere but towards him. Only once her glance encountered his, and then the warm blood suffused her cheek, and the brown eyes were lost to him again.

"Presently, to his relief, John D'Anyer expressed his intention to go downstairs and smoke a pipe with the landlord in the bar; and soon after Mrs. Bancroft was afraid she had not packed everything in her saddle-bags.

What a delicious half-hour was that in which the lovers were alone for the first time since he had gained the good-will of her friends. The window seat was wide enough for two, and, all the formality of the time notwithstanding, the head which the sunset brightened like an aureola rested against his manly breast, as if there was all her world.

What to her was a year, what to her the long hours of stitchery, so long as he loved her and was there to tell her so, and to tell her too how proudly her father had spoken

of her; how willing his own father was that he should make his own choice of a wife?

All her troubled past seemed to drift away from her in the fulness of her joy, and she silently thanked God for the true heart he had given her, and for the promise of the future.

Ah, that future, how bright was the pencil with which Arthur pictured it; his own uniform had no richer hues. He was so sanguine; so overbrimmed with love's ecstatic bliss. And if he pressed his lips to hers as though they were the lips of a saint; yet was the saint all his own.

Only half-an-hour, and so much yet unsaid! By whose ruthless orders was the tea-board sent in to cut the precious moments short, and bring back all the commonplace realities of food and people?

No prouder lover ever parted from his betrothed than Arthur Wynne when he left Muriel at that door with the brass-plate, where he had once before left her so differ-

ently; and he carried away with him the sweetly-perfumed sprig of late jessamine she had worn that day in her bosom, to be kept as a memorial along with the spray of eye-bright he had preserved as a relic so long.

No happier girl than Muriel laid her head upon a pillow that night, albeit only of hard flock in a barely-furnished attic, where was no privacy, even for prayer. How was it that in the midst of her delight she thought so much of Milly Hargreaves, and wondered what her unrevealed secret could be, hoping too that much happiness might be in store for *her?*

It would have taken the bloom off her own delicious satisfaction could she have looked behind the love-making shepherds and shepherdesses on Milly's curtains, and seen the tear-stained face that tossed from side to side among the soft pillows from which rest was banished.

The day that had been so full of hope and joy for Muriel and Arthur, had dashed

the cup of hope from the lips of two others equally as fond.

In the midst of the morning service at the Manchester Collegiate Church that Sunday, there might have been seen a movement in two pews when the long string of banns were read out, and two heads held up erect, as if all ear. The one the head of a rough, well-to-do individual whose Sunday suit sat on him with an unaccustomed air, whilst his hands bore testimony that the dyes he used were "fast-colours;" the other a man of more gentlemanlike bearing; neither members of the congregation.

The names of Milly Hargreaves and Robert Bent slipped over the rough tongue of the eccentric chaplain, Joshua Brooks.

At once the two men rose from their seats with the simultaneous cry, "I forbid the banns," and all eyes were turned upon them, for they were well-known men in the town.

"Yo' must come into th' vestry at th' close of th' service, and there state yor objections," proclaimed Joshua from the

pulpit, and went on through his list of names, and the remainder of the service as coolly as if two young hearts in the congregation were not beating like muffled drums.

The two fathers had the same plea: the candidates for matrimony were "under age."

"Well," said the parson, "they'll mend o' that, if there be no other impediment."

"I have other views for my son, and I forbid these banns," said Charles Bent stiffly.

"And so have I for my Milly, so we're quits, Mr. Bent. Though if your son had come to me and bid fair for the lass, straightforward and up-and-above-board, there's no saying but what I might have been tempted to listen, and lay down guinea for guinea with you to set the young folk going. But *now*, he shouldn't have her if every hair of his head were tagged with a diamond, the mean, sneaking cur."

"Hush! hush! Remember where you are! If you must quarrel, let it be outside the

church," interposed the clergyman; but Charles Bent, with a scornful curl of lip, and a muttered something that sounded like having "no mind to let Bob grope for guineas in a dye vat," had already turned to depart.

"Tak' care th' young limb o' th' law doesn't grope for guineas in dirtier places," James Hargreaves shouted after the blue-coated gentleman across the churchyard, little caring who heard him.

And so the two fathers separated and went their way, well content with their morning's work, although they had wrecked two young lives.

Robert Bent and Milly, there to hear the banns from an obscure corner, had hurried from the old church together; scarcely paused as they went past the Grammar School and turned down Mill-brow over the wooden bridge across the Irk, out of the way of the curious throng. Owners of the garden-plots which overlooked the river, smoking their pipes at the doors of their little summer-houses, or gathering sweet-scented posies, cast

their eyes on the discomposed pair, nodded significantly to each other, or pointed with their pipe-stems, but Milly and Robert went on, in too much trouble to heed them. They struck across the rising ground, known as Walker's croft, now cut up by railway-lines and stations, but then the home of the daisy and the dandelion, and under a clump of trees in the rear of that Caledonian colony still y'clept Scotland, there was a passionate parting of the cousins, who were never to be more than cousins, though they vowed fidelity and constancy to their lives' end.

There was an angry scene at the Horrocks when Milly stole into the house where her father was waiting to taunt her with treachery and duplicity; and to speak that of her lover which sounded like treason in her ears.

He was neither choice nor kind in his language; seemed to have no compassion for the motherless girl who had rarely wiser counsellor than her own will; and wound up with the declaration that she needed the restraint of a husband old enough to look

after her, and that he meant her to have one too, who would take her without a shilling; not a chap dependent on his father, who was not out of his articles. He bade her, with an oath, put all romantic nonsense out of her head, for he had promised her to John Stott, and John Stott she must have, or she might go a begging, and try how that would suit her ladyship.

At the name of John Stott, Milly put her trembling hands up to her head as if to shut out the hateful sound from her ears, and with a passionate, despairing cry that she would "drown herself," rushed out of the house towards the river.

Quick as light her father was after her. His strong hand gripped her gloved arm like a vice, and brought her, struggling, back.

She was urged up the stairs before him to her own room, and there he locked her in, to throw herself upon the floor and wear her strength away in hysterics—unheeded and alone.

And so the mid-day passed, and the night.

The door was locked and James Hargreaves kept the key. No one came near with food or light, and the morning dawned, and another day reached its meridian before her father thought proper to open the door and ask if she had come to her senses.

Romantic, loving, weak, she was unable to contend with the determined will of her father; she could answer only with sobs—sobs for herself and the Robert she knew she had lost.

Her "great secret" was told to all the town, and a sorrowful secret it was for both of them.

Robert Bent did not turn up either at the office or the Grange for upwards of a week, a week spent in reckless dissipation. And then Joe, who had a sort of fellow-feeling for his brother's disappointment, sought him out and induced him to go home. There, nothing was said to him one way or other. But he was never the same Bob Bent again.

It appeared that he had counted on the

absence of his uncles and others from the Old Church during Chester Fair to get the banns published without observation. His uncle James Hargreaves attended the new church of St Michael not far from his own works. Milly could easily make an excuse of a visit to the D'Anyers to sit out the third reading.

But one of those busybodies whose ears are always open, and who must thrust their dirty fingers into other people's pies, had taken care to be first with the news, and "congratulated" both the dyer and the cotton-spinner on the coming bridal. At least Robert Bent denounced the informant as a busybody.

Possibly, had Robert gone to his father and her father in the first instance, though there might have been some demur, they might have been won over in time, for Milly was an only child, her father a man of means, and the Bents were reputed rich. The rash and premature act which took the grace of choice from their elders, irritated, exasperated, and shut out all hope of concession.

Milly looked blankly out on the future; Robert, with an obstinate rebellious intention to be the victor in the end. "Only wait until I am of age," he said to himself, as he had said to her.

Time does not travel empty handed, but he rarely brings us what we expect or what we crave.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER SECRET OUT.

THE Monday morning that beheld Milly Hargreaves tossing on a sleepless pillow, saw Sarah Bancroft setting off from the Yacht Inn comfortably and complacently; her business done satisfactorily, her favourite grandchild in a fair way to a happy marriage with the man of her choice; a man who would lift her up, not drag her down. She had not felt so blithe for many years. There had been a slight frost during the night, and the air was crisp and exhilarating. There was no breath or shadow of any trouble or scandal brooding over any of her family connections however remote. She was at ease with the world and with herself.

Business people with large sums of money

about them travelled in company for mutual security when practicable. She was mounted on horseback as usual, accompanied by the warehouseman who attended her in the absence of Samuel, an old servant named Cutts, and made one of the Manchester party travelling homewards, which also included her brother-in-law Solomon, and John D'Anyer; who beguiled the way with an interchange of opinions on the threatened invasion by the French, and its effects on the commerce of the country, not unaccompanied by denunciations of French goods, even brandy, seeing that it was scarce and dear; and that empty flasks necessitated a stoppage at the Kelsall roadside inn for draughts of ale in lieu thereof.

How was it that that brief stoppage for refreshments, which she did not hesitate to partake, as they did, without quitting the saddle, took all the buoyancy out of her? Was it because the inn reminded her of the serving-man Norris, who had been carried there wounded so many years before? or what?

The turnpike road was lively with groups of mountebanks, showmen and their caravans, and other horsemen and conveyances at the break-up of the busy fair. She was anything but a timid woman, and it could not be fear of her own safety or that of her cash that brought up to her mind with recurring vitality from the moment she entered Delamere her own commonplace remark to Arthur Wynne, "There's no knowing what may happen before the year comes to an end."

She tried to shake it off, but it would not be shaken off, though she talked business to her man as she jogged along, nodded to people as they passed, and exchanged opinions on trade or war with her travelling companions.

But Sarah Bancroft was not on the look-out for presentiments, and if she brought her silver whistle nearer to her hand when they reached the spot where the by-road branched off towards Eddisbury, near Hind's Well, and she took leave of her home-going

friends, it was but a matter of customary precaution, not of fear that anything would happen.

There was no need for the whistle, Nothing crossed their path more formidable than a scurrying hare or rabbit, nothing met or overtook them but a turf-cutter with a couple of laden donkeys, and a child with a bundle of faggots. Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley received her with open-handed hospitality as of old; Dr. Holmes and his daughter had been invited to meet her; his partner Asa Booth, shortly to marry Lucinda Holmes, was to join them later on, as an escort home through the forest; there was a savoury dinner smoking on the board by the time she had got rid of her travelling gear and the road-marks; there was much to ask and much to tell, for here was Miss Holmes about to marry, and Muriel under promise.

And being comfortable, Mrs. Bancroft settled herself down for an afternoon's enjoyment, leaving business, contrary to custom,

for the morrow. Happen! What should happen?

Dinner was over, Mrs. Bancroft was seated in a cozy easy chair on one side of the fragrant and popping wood fire, the two men on the oak settle opposite were puffing away at long clay pipes, with a couple of tankards of home-brewed ale on a small round table before them.

Mrs. Kingsley had drawn a high-backed chair of black oak close to her old friend, Miss Holmes had placed herself in a window-seat, and from a crimson leather reticule produced some light needlework, and Mr. Kingsley was jocularly asking if that was for the wedding, when there was a sort of scuffling noise outside, and in rushed a boy about eight or nine years old, in a rough suit of corduroys, with thick clogs, his hair in a tangle, his face grimy and streaked with the course of tears.

For an instant only he stood abashed by the presence of strangers, then darted up to Mrs. Kingsley, who had risen, and clung to her

skirts as he cried out, "Oh, Mrs. Kingsley, what's to be done, what's to be done? Constables have bin an' takken Bill an' Moiles to jail, an' they've pulled oop th' floors an' brokken down th' chimbley, an' they've found o' soorts o' things; an' Mammy Blackburn shriked, an' hoo's gone to Manchester to get summat as they call bail, an' albi;* and I'm frightened; an' oh, Mrs. Kingsley, wheere am I to go, and what am I to do?" and his outburst over, he broke down in childlike sobs.

At the first sound of his voice Mrs. Bancroft had gripped the arms of her chair, half rising, her keen eyes fixed upon his face, as though she would trace its every line. As he ended she stood upon her feet, erect and stern, and in a voice hard and imperative demanded, "What boy is that?"

Mrs. Kingsley looked at her husband, but no one answered.

The question was repeated: "Whose boy is that, I ask?"

Mrs. Kingsley had a spirit to match Sarah

* Probably alibi.

Bancroft. She caught the boy by the hand, and as if glad to throw off a burdensome secret, marched him up to the old woman's chair, with the words, "Well, Mrs. Bancroft, it's quite time you knew who that boy is. He's your *grandson;* your Sam's first-born! Lydia and Sam were married full three years before you thought they were."

Mrs. Bancroft had stood like one frozen to stone whilst this was said.

"Is this true?" she asked after a while, in a sort of chilled undertone.

"True enough," struck in the forester, "I saw them myself coming out of St. Olave's Church, Chester, and I had the curiosity to go in and see what took them there, and to look at the register, though I had to pay for the sight. And the book's there for you to look at too, dame, if you're hard of belief."

She took no note of the child, who still clung to Mrs. Kingsley; her only comment—in the same dry, hard tone—was, "And Farmer Bradley?"

"Farmer Bradley knew no more than you, Mrs. Bancroft, till Mr. Samuel came at Christmas to fetch his wife, and they had to show the marriage lines, and there was a fine rumpus."

"But the boy—the farmer must have known?"

"Poor lad, he was born at Maggy Blackburn's, and there in the heart of the wood Maggy nursed him, and there he's been ever since, and she's behaved none too well to him, though she's been well paid to keep the secret. Very much better than she deserved. And he's never seen mother nor father save once in a while. Though I did hear that Lydia was breaking her heart about him."

"And you—you—my own old friends, have let me come and go, and never warned me against the treachery I was fostering; have let *my grandson* be reared among wretches like the Blackburns, and never breathed a syllable to save him from contamination," and the old woman ground her teeth in bitterness.

"Nay, nay," quoth the forester; "blame your own son, not us. 'Twas his fault, and his business, not ours. We're no mischief-makers. My dame's done the best she could for the lad; he's lived here half his time. He was only sent back yesterday for fear you should see him!"

"For *fear!*" she echoed scornfully. "Come here, lad" (to the boy). "They say thah belong to me, and there's that in thi features and in thi voice that tells me it is true. Go and wash thi face and come back here. I am going to take thee home with me. Do you understand?"

The boy understood vaguely, but her aspect was not inviting. He did not stir; he only stared and clung to Mrs. Kingsley.

She stooped and kissed the dirty face. "Jem, go to your grandmother; she will take you to see your mammy in Manchester."

Jem's eyes expanded. "Wull she?" he interrogated. "Then I'll go."

And without another word he clattered off

to return in a short time with a clean face, and the hair which had resisted the tugging of a comb plastered down with water.

But Sarah Bancroft was off. Gone to have the horse saddled, and the man looked up for a sharp gallop to Waverham. She had business on hand of more moment than the buying of skins. There could be no more sleeping under a roof where Sam's deceit had been hushed up, hidden from her; nay, for aught she knew, mayhap connived at. Treachery, treachery, wherever she turned! And Sam—Sam of all the world! It wrung her heart to think of it all. But she'd see to it!

Dr. Holmes and Lucinda had held aloof from this strange scene, but no sooner was she gone than tongues were loosened and the probable consequences of this discovery discussed very freely, all agreeing that it was a good thing it had not been deferred until the lad was older; a good thing for him and for his mother too. They were not so sure about Mr. Sam. Then the boy himself was

told to count himself fortunate and to be a good boy, and go with his grandmother like a brave little man, and he should come back and see them all some day.

An under-keeper had been despatched to Waverham and Maggy's cottage for news, but Sarah Bancroft was back before the man. She was not communicative and she refused to alight, but she gave the little fellow a shilling as an inducement to quit the Kingsley's and allow himself to be placed on the saddle in front of her warehouseman.

"I don't like the set of the old woman's face," cried the forester when she was finally gone and the boy with her. "It bodes no good to Mr. Samuel; and serve him right, for she's been a good mother to him, though something hard in her ways. But hard as she looks, Sarah Bancroft has a soft place in her heart."

"I only wish she had let little Jem feel it," was the sharp commentary of his wife. "If she'd given him a kiss instead of a shilling, the little lad's heart would have opened, and

he'd have gone away without a whimper. But it's my belief Sarah Bancroft keeps *her* heart in her pocket."

"Wherever she keeps it, wife, she's found room there for the poor neglected little chap. 'I've no mind he shall suffer for the sin of his father,' she said to me before she went. 'And whatever I do, I'll bring him up to fear the Lord, and then perhaps he'll honour his parents.' Think of that from *her!*"

Night had fallen, and rain was falling when Sarah Bancroft and her escort left the forest behind and neared Northwich.

It was not possible to proceed that night. Weary with more than her long ride or her weight of years, the care-worn woman was glad of an excuse to seek the privacy of her solitary couch, even at an inn. Supper she could not eat, though she saw that little Jem was well fed before she consigned him for the night to the charge of Cutts, her man.

She had warehouse business likewise with a shopkeeper in Northwich that kept her

for an hour or two in the morning; and then she called upon Dr. Holmes to question him concerning Maggy Blackburn; but the doctor could tell her no more than she had learned on the spot. Money and jewelry had been found secreted under the floors, numbers of little bones were said to have been dug up in the garden; and the woman had disappeared to avoid capture on her own score.

By this time there was a necessity for a substantial luncheon, if not for herself, at all events, for the others, and the delay retarded their appearance in Manchester until the lamp-lighter was going his round with ladder and flaring oil-can, to the wonder and delight of country-born Jem; and all that time his grandmother's grief and indignation had been gathering force, seething and fermenting in her silent breast.

At Hyde's Cross she alighted. The man was sent home with the horses and saddle-bags. They, with all the gold in them, were

as nothing to her now. She could not allow her purpose to cool.

Whatever that purpose was, her features were so set and hard, that little Jem instinctively shrank as she put forth her hand. He had been used to blows, and looked for one; but it was not for a blow, it was only to close upon his in a tightening clasp.

When Mrs. Bancroft turned the handle of her son's door in Toad Lane, and sent the boy, clogged and hatless as he was, into the house before her, she only added to a scene of previous commotion, and in a sense brought relief both to Sam and Lydia.

It has been already told that the house was an old black-and-white timber-and-rubble building, with overhanging stories, and the door, from which ran an oaken screen, or "spear," opened into the main room or house-place. At the end of this spear stood Maggy Blackburn with her arms akimbo, the hood of her grey cloak thrown back, leaving her sharp profile clearly defined against the

firelight, and adding by her body to the length of the screen.

There was no need of Mrs. Bancroft's grip on Jem's shoulder to draw him back; the sound of Maggy's uplifted voice sent him shrinking closer into the shadow to clasp his less formidable grandmother's hand for protection. The opening of the door, their footsteps, even Jem's clogs were unheard in the altercation going on. "An' you *dare* tell *me* yo wunna go bail or get up an aliby for my lads again! But if yo dunna, Sam Bancroft, an' yo wunna swear they were moiles away from Darbysheer that noight, I'll go right away to Red Bank an' let out the saicret I've kept so long o'er that lad o' yors that Lydia's bin pining o'er so long."

The stroke of the ignotus is not more paralysing than was the touch of Sarah Bancroft's hand on the woman's sinewy arm, or the sight of the boy, on whom Lydia flung herself with a sobbing shriek.

Bold Maggy seemed to collapse and cower

as the other's wrathful voice was heard; and Sam stood aghast; dumbfounded.

"Thah vile wretch, how dare thah urge my son to stain our honest name with perjury? To go bail for murderous ruffians like thy sons. It's time *they* had their deserts, and no magistrate in the county would take bail for a crime like theirs? Out of the house this instant, before I send for a constable! *I* know all the secret thah's kept so long, and *how* you have kept it, and *more besides*—I'm fresh from Waverham, Maggy Blackburn." And the little woman's keen eyes looked the other through.

"May be other folk's sons will get their deserts afore long!" hissed Maggy through her set teeth, as she edged herself off behind the spear, and darted off into the street without another word. She knew the danger of waiting for a constable.

"Yes, Sam, other folk's sons *will* get their deserts afore long. That boy is *mine*. Thou hast repudiated him, left him to perish soul and body. I shall provide for *him*. But I

have done with *thee*. I shall dissolve the partnership; wind up the business. Thah will have thy share, nothing more. And don't thee show thy face at th' works again, or it'll be worse for thee. Come, Jem, we are going home. Lydia, thah can see the boy when thah like."

And home she took him without further parley, utterly refusing to listen to Sam's blundering attempt at excuse, buying the lad shoes and a cap by the way, and leaving Sam to rub his thighs and reflect.

She too reflected, and remembered that the woman had said "go bail *again*." What could that mean? Was he so afraid of his mother that rather than reveal his forbidden marriage he had perjured his soul for wretches like the Blackburns? Look at it as she would the thought stung like an adder.

CHAPTER VII.

JUSTICE.

THAT month of October, 1796, was memorable not merely in the annals of a family, but of the nation; and pretty much as the king and his commons resented the insult of France to his peace plenipotentiary in more vigorous preparations for war, so did Sarah Bancroft resent the secret marriage and the double dealing of her son, at all risks, at any cost.

She had set him upon a pinnacle as an exemplar of filial obedience; had cited his deferred marriage as an instance of his self-abnegation, extolled his steady, sober, thrifty business habits as the result of her careful training; and done it with a concentration of affection, admiration, and

reliance, little suspected in the keen, unsentimental trader.

The first doubt of his impeccability had struck her on the night of her unexpected return from Chester with Muriel; and, one by one, other flaws in her "perfect chrysolite" had been dimly perceptible, but she had either scouted her suspicions as chimeras, or set the change in her son down to the account of his wife, who from the first had held aloof from Red Bank in a way most incomprehensible.

"There's something I can't fathom about that Lydia!" she had been wont to say to herself. "She seems afraid to open her lips or show her face!"

She had penetrated the mystery at last; had discovered how Lydia's lips had been sealed; who was the one at fault. The idol had toppled down and been shattered in the fall. Treacherous to his young sister, treacherous to her, to the woman he had married, to her father, even to his unoffending boy, his only son; treacherous to

the verge of cruelty—a living and breathless deception where she had dreamed an embodiment of truth and integrity.

She felt the shame and disgrace of his dissimulation if he did not, and her mental agony was not to be told. A stern front might be kept to the world, but the mother's wounded heart bled within.

Notwithstanding her overnight prohibition Sam had the boldness to present himself at the furriery in the morning as usual.

It was customary, when he entered at the door on Red Bank, for Margery to meet him at the foot of the stairs with the keys of yard and warehouse. No Margery was there.

He walked forward. Through the broad kitchen window, in the front of which his sister had stood washing lace when the secret of her stolen match came to light nineteen years before, he saw the workpeople trooping into the yard with a clatter, some turning into the sheds, others—chiefly women—mounting the outside stairs to the warehouse.

"Margery! Who unlocked the gate?" he demanded sharply, as the woman came in from the pump with the bright copper-kettle in her hand.

"Cutts, Mester Sam."

"By whose orders?"

"Missus's."

"Where's my mother?"

"In the counting-house."

"And where's Jem?"

"In bed, poor lad."

The counting-house lay behind the best parlour just as the kitchen behind the sitting-room, and its window overlooked the yard and workpeople; it had two entrances one from the yard, the other from the lobby of the house, close to the staircase foot.

If he had thought to find his mother in bed after her long journey, and to be himself first in the counting house, he was mistaken. His brows contracted, there was perplexity in his cunning eyes. He stood a moment, then grasping his smoothly-shaven chin between his left thumb and forefinger as if to hold by

something—if that something was only himself—he strode across the lobby to the counting-house.

The books lay on the desk, open. Cutts, with an air of new importance, was leaving by the opposite door, and Sarah Bancroft was throwing after him her final instructions. "It must be seen to at once."

She turned sharply as she heard the step of her son; and stood with her back to the high desk, as if standing sentry over it.

"What brings thee here?" she asked abruptly, confronting him with a stern, rigid face, where the high cheek-bones and hard mouth seemed to stand more prominently out, and the ruddy veining of the healthy cheeks to have grown purple against the grey hue which had crept over her complexion so newly.

"What brings me here? Where should I be if not in my own place?" he answered with affected coolness.

"*Thy* place? Aye, so long as I thought thah wast treading i' thi father's footsteps it

was thy place. But dost thah think thah'rt fit to sit on the seat of a just and honest man, to have thy name in a business he made and left with an honest name? Dost thah?" and with her hand on the high-stool which had seen so many years' service, she stood and looked him searchingly in the face.

"Aye," was his unflinching answer. "I do. If I've done wrong the fault lies at your door, and *I've* had all the blame and the harass. Why did you set so many stumbling blocks in my path, striving to keep me single till my best days were gone? I married a decent lass, and if I didn't bring her home no fault of mine. Had not you forbidden me to marry before I was a partner? and had not you put off the partnership from time to time as if you meant me to be a bachelor all my life?"

"I wish it *had* been put off for ever," she said with deliberate incisiveness, "I'll see that it *is* put off for ever, and that without delay. Was it fault of mine that thah winked at thi young sister's secret marriage, and forebore to

inform me, before or after? Was it fault of mine that I find thee leagued with common robbers, to screen their crimes?"

Sam visibly quailed before her; still he did his best to keep a bold front.

"Aye, mother," answered he, "if you had not been so stern and hard, Ellen might never have gone off on the sly as *she* did; nor I been afraid to break the ice for her. And if you hadn't driven Lydia and me to extremities with your whims about early marriages, and kept one on tenter-hooks lest our secret should leak out, *we* might never have been in Maggy Blackburn's clutches, or bound to do her bidding. I'm sure I've done my honest best in the business here, and you can't deny it, hard as you are!"

To Samuel's attempted justification she had listened, but the impression he made was adverse only. In calling her "hard" he smote her as with a stone.

"Thah repeated thi sister's offence, without thi sister's excuse. If I was hard, Farmer Bradley was not. Was my wrath

more to be feared than the peril of thy own son's soul among robbers and worse? Was I hard to Ellen in the long run? If I forgave her, might I not have forgiven thee, if asked? Had I ever a hint that thah wanted to marry? Thah never said one word to plead for the sister I cast off. Thah mayst spare thi words now. I have done with *thee*. I shall see if I can make a better man of thy son. Let Lydia come week by week for what cash thah requires, but never do thah set foot on these premises again at thy peril. I'll see no time is lost in closing the business, and handing over every shilling that is fairly thine. But I shall deal with thee through my attorney. And now go."

Sam, who had noticed that never once during this colloquy had she addressed him by his familiar name, made another attempt to retain his position and insist on his rights as a partner. He might better have attempted to move a stone wall.

Then he tried an appeal to her motherly feelings, and professed contrition. Had he

done so at first, had he come and made a candid confession, late as it was, she might have relented, but now she only looked at him with gathering scorn, and bade him "Begone."

"The man who thought so hardly of his own mother that he could leave his lawful wife to suffer all the pangs of shame, with no refuge in her extremity but Maggy Blackburn's; could suffer his lawful son to be born and hidden away like an unblest babe, and could let that woman and her sons hang this secret like a millstone round his neck rather than risk the loss of hard cash dependent on a *hard* mother's favour, deserves to find the *hard* mother *hard* as he fancied her. Go! I say, if thah would not have thy disgraceful story told to every workman on the premises!"

Thus adjured, he slunk away; went back through the house, so bitter against the boy who was likely to supercede him, that though he heard Jem talking to Margery of the strange things he had seen on his journey,

he never set his foot in the kitchen, or called the child to him for a father's embrace.

Fortunately for the boy he had fallen into better hands. Hard as was Sarah Bancroft to the outer world she was never hard to the child. Her son's reproach had galled and stung her. To him she was henceforth hard as flint; to her ill-used grandson she was soft as down. A mutual affection sprang up between the old heart and the young one, and no doubt kept that old one from breaking.

Indeed, the boy was her first care. He was respectably attired, sent to school, openly acknowledged as her grandson, James Bancroft—Jem no longer.

Her next was to seek her lawyer, make a fresh will, take measures for annulling the partnership between herself and son, and for winding up the business. Her first move in that direction had been made when she left Delamere without buying a single skin.

Her son Samuel had gone home like a beaten cur, yet nursing his passion as he

went. Livid with suppressed fury he entered his house, only to assail his wife as the primary cause of all his misfortunes; to curse the day he had ever seen her face or been deluded into making her his wife.

"What could I see in your apple-cheeks to make me forget the risk I ran? If you had not entrapped me, lured me into marrying you then and there——"

"*I* entrapped you, Sam?" interrupted Lydia in terrified amazement.

"Aye, you, if you with your smiles and your wiles had not befooled me, or my mother had been one a man could speak his mind freely to, there would have been no need to marry in haste, only to——"

"In haste, Sam, why, we had been courting five years," put in Lydia timidly, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Better have courted ten years, than have come to this pitch. But for our hasty marriage and the coming of that lad, there would have been no need of that greedy old hag. Curse her! and her sons too! and those

who brought me into her diabolical clutches! Their hands were never out of my pocket!"

He gripped his hands and flung his arms aloft so wildly, that sobbing Lydia could but cower in her chair and shrink from him in terror. Yet amongst it all she could thank God their little girl was safely out of the way at school, and would hear nothing of this outburst—hear nothing of the accusation launched against herself, that she had lured her husband to his ruin.

She knew it to be utterly untrue. Knew how she had combated his pleadings for a private marriage, begged him at least to take her father into his confidence, both before her marriage and after. Gone on her knees to him not to leave their boy with the Blackburns, but to ask her father's care for him, if he was afraid of the mother he pronounced so harsh and hard.

He seemed to ignore all this, and as he paced the floor of their household room, spoke only of himself as the sport of fate, the innocent victim of others' wiles and

wickedness. Not for one moment did he blame his own duplicity and cunning, his own want of manliness to break the meshes of his own web.

Yet, coward that he was, and conscience-smitten under all, he had not had courage to assert his rights as a partner in the furriery and brave his strong-willed mother, lest she should carry out her threat and unveil him then and there.

He loved money, and the closing of the prosperous concern would shut him out from making or handling it. He had no fear of his mother's strict justice; no fear that she would deprive him of the means to live.

But—and this stung him worst of all—he was only to receive it through Lydia—Lydia would learn to despise him when she knew how liberal had been his incomings compared with his meagre allowance to her.

Suddenly, as a new thought struck him, he left Lydia rocking herself in her agony of grief and trouble, and hurried out of the house in search of John D'Anyer; hardly

heeding or seeing the nods of passing acquaintances, as he went up Shudehill towards Sugar Lane.

He found his brother-in-law in his warehouse, directing the unpacking of the goods the carrier had just brought in from Chester; goods unsold and others taken in exchange.

James Hargreaves had just quitted the warehouse, leaving behind his version of Milly's disobedient act, and John D'Anyer's hearty concurrence in her choice between two suitors. She was wise, he said, Bob Bent was a gentleman, Stott, with all his money, never was and never would be. He was quite compassionate towards the young people, and full of the subject. It was some little time before Samuel could find an opening for his plausible tale. That he was the first to tell it he felt assured, from the lightness of the other's manner, and the ease of his reception.

Sam began with an appeal to his fellow-feeling and sympathy as a man and a gentleman. "He had fallen into disgrace with

his mother," he said, "and had come straight to him for his counsel and intervention, knowing well he could depend on him. He need not tell him how averse his mother was to his marrying, or what had made her so. Well, he had fallen in love with Lydia, when quite a young fellow, and had been courting her so many years that at last to prevent someone else snapping her up (he said nothing of Farmer Bradley's cash), he ventured to marry her, hoping to win his mother over in a month or two. That three years had gone by before he had permission to bring home a wife, and it was only by stealth he could see either Lydia or the boy she had borne him, all those years."

"A boy!" exclaimed Mr. D'Anyer, "then little Lyd was not your 'first.'" The D'Anyers had lost three boys in their infancy.

"No, worse luck," cried Sam, and ground his teeth, "but for him our secret might have lain hid till domesday. Mother came across the lad, either at Waverham, or the Kingsleys, ferreted out proofs of our marriage somehow,

brought Jem home with her; and now is for turning me out of the business and winding it up. A pretty kettle-of-fish because a man is honourable, and marries a woman instead of keeping dangling after her for half-a-score of years to please another woman's whim."

"Where is the lad?"

"Oh, Jem's at mother's, she means to keep him," she says, "and discard me."

"*Jem!* eh? Ah, I begin to smell a rat! I think Ellen and Muriel made his acquaintance some years ago. But, come to the point, Sam, what do you want from me?"

"Well, mother's confoundedly savage, and I want you to pacify her if you can. I know she has the highest respect for you—and—well, you see, if she overlooked Ellen's offence, she may be induced to overlook mine. It all depends on the mediator. I can trust you as a *gentleman* to do your utmost for me and Lydia."

"Tchut, tchut!" said he, "you might find many a better ambassador. But come into the

house and let us talk it over with Ellen during dinner."

Sam had played on the other's "gentlemanly" foible with success.

John D'Anyer, who knew only part of the case and nothing of the Blackburn's, went to intercede for his brother-in-law. "You forgave us," he said, "don't be too hard upon Sam."

"And no thanks to him that I did! He has been hard upon Lydia, hard upon his boy. I might have forgiven his marriage at the time, I cannot forgive that now after his ten years' deceit. My dealings have been honest, upright, straightforward; I am bound to wind up the business lest Sam should bring it into discredit. The man who is systematically dishonest to his mother will not be honest to the world. I'll see that he is paid his fair share to the last penny, and then he may go where he likes, do what he likes, set up in what line he chooses; but the books of Sarah Bancroft and Son will be closed, never to be re-opened. I'll see he deceives *me* no more."

If this had been a prompt decision, it had not been made without a sharp struggle; and her face, harder, sterner, more deeply-lined, betrayed it. But her motives for thus abruptly calling in her accounts and closing an old established business she did not reveal to strangers, and when Pitt's reckless withdrawal of specie for war purposes and the service of doubtful allies caused the Bank of England to stop payment the following February, amid a general commercial panic, she was congratulated right and left on her foresight.

It did not take long either to wind up the concern. Credit had not attained its present formidable proportions. Much of the Bancrofts' dealings, especially with Irish and Welsh traders, had been either barter or cash transactions; and few, indeed, were her outstanding debts when she presented herself in the Manchester Hall at the next October Fair, not to buy or sell, but to confirm the fact that the furriers, Bancroft and Son, would manufacture, buy, or sell, no more.

What she had given up, the active, energetic woman scarcely realized so long as there was business of any kind to do. It was not until the last cartload of skins had left the warehouse, when the clatter of clogs had ceased, when the ledgers were closed and carried from the office, when a great "To Let" was chalked on the gate of the deserted premises in the rear of the house and silence succeeded bustle, that she felt the full meaning of her own act.

Her former customer in Buxton, in the belief that she must have some interest in the family of the young officer who had been so intimate with Mrs. and Miss D'Anyer, had kept her as well informed of the progress of Sir Madoc Wynne's daughter and son-in-law towards recovery and of the trial of the two Blackburns as could be learned from the sources available to them. Her informant had no suspicion of any keener or closer interest in the matter; certainly Mrs. Bancroft's steady-going son's connection with the murdering horse-stealers was never dreamed of.

The stolen horses had been found at a horse-fair so far away as Skipton in Craven, the men themselves in Delamere.

It came out on the trial that as they rode down from the Winnats, and through Castleton at a hard pace, a blacksmith had called after them that the black horse had a shoe loose, had been answered with a gruff curse that he "had best mind his own business," and that the blacksmith standing out in the road had shouted after them along the Sheffield road that it was his business, but that if they lamed the good beast it might hinder their business, and his remarks to the loungers around the smithy called attention to "the queer customers who were so shy of being customers."

The cast shoe had hindered their business and kept them in Sheffield to have the horse shod; and there again the long figures and short tempers of the men were observed, and not altogether as strangers. There was another stoppage at Huddersfield, and there the men had parted with not only the horses

but the garments stolen from their victims. Sir Jenkyn's groom and another from the Buxton stables were set on the trail of the beasts; and the clothes-dealer, being pounced upon as a receiver of stolen goods, gave the constables all the clue they needed.

Among the many rings and watches found in Maggy's cottage was the watch of Norris, another strand in the rope which was twisted to hang her two sons. It was inscribed as the gift of his master for faithful service, bore names and dates, or it might long before have been parted with. In those days of blood-money, it was not safe to trust "receivers" with too much.

There was evidence to hang the men thrice over.

Sir Jenkyn's was conclusive.

He had wanted a guide, the man Miles Blackburn had volunteered, had led them to the Chapel; had offered to show them a more picturesque road back, had beguiled them into a horrid mountain pass where the other man lay in wait, and before

they had time to think the two were upon them.

The blacksmith added his testimony, and a woman who saw them ride sharply down the descent from the Winnats, also recognized them.

Had there been any doubt of the prisoners' guilt, it would have been dispelled by a confession made by the elder brother, Miles. Not only had it been their intent, in conjunction with the postboy, to rob Captain Wynne years before, but disappointed of that they had waylaid the first solitary traveller they met, who happened to be the very captain's servant. That a friend of their mother's had found them a lawyer, and he had found means to get them off. That on another occasion he had himself robbed and murdered a gentleman who had hired him as a guide, and pitched the body into Eldon Hole, and if his brother had met him there, and not made a mistake, he had intended to have served the new-married folk the same, and if they had done so there would have been no tales

told. Eldon Hole kept its secrets close and for ever. He had many more crimes on his conscience he said, and he could not die without lightening the load.

It was a relief to Sarah Bancroft to find that in this confession—made in the cart beneath the gallows, whilst the other felon remained sullenly mute—printed and circulated by hawkers over the country, no mention was made by name of the "friend" who had found the lawyer years before. It was sufficiently mortifying to think that her son had consented to screen such wretches rather than brave her anger; and it did not serve to alter her resolution one whit. She carried out her plans to the end. She carried them out, but there were thorns under the victor's wreath. The old business was no more. What would life be to her when her last farewell was said to her many old customers in the Manchester Hall which she had helped to build?

Yet the journey to Chester put thought aside for a time; for her business was not

wholly unpleasant. She had gone to Waverham by the way, and there arranged with Farmer Bradley to take their grandson in two or three years and make a farmer of him, promising to leave the farm to the boy. And she anticipated the pleasure of freeing Muriel.

With the Kingsleys she made no stay. She had not forgiven them for leaving her in the dark so long, whilst her little grandchild was being ill-used and neglected, if not worse. She could not pass through the forest without thought of all that had happened within its bounds. Yet she hurried on with a grim sense of satisfaction that justice had been meted out on the wrong-doers. Had *she* not been dealing retributive justice forth, even to the wounding of her own heart? She went forward to release Muriel and see her indentures cancelled, with less of tenderness towards the girl than of triumph over Mrs. Hopley.

"I don't see what John and Ellen have to grumble about; they've had one less to

keep these hard times, and the discipline has done the lass good. Taught her humility and obedience to her elders. It's a pity her stuck-up sisters had not been ground in the same mill. They'd be none the worse for it," she argued with herself; but she lost sight entirely of the religious training of the girl, the receptive soil, the seeds sown early by the mother hand, the fostering and watering under Miss Williams' gentle care, the companionship and influence of Deborah Massey's old Bible! True, she herself had taken to study the Great Book in her lonely hours, but she read it not aright. She read it rather to support her own views and prejudices, than to undermine and refashion them. And consciously or unconsciously she felt empowered to hold in her own hand the balance of justice even, and to cast what she would of reward or penalty into the scales of the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEPARATION.

MEANWHILE the year had not brought to Muriel D'Anyer unmingled bliss, although love had opened out new vistas of delight, and given to life a fulness and completeness all love's own. She saw not much of Arthur, had no leisure to answer a tithe of his many treasured billets; but he held unimpeached his place as the noble Prince Arthur of her girlish dreams and imaginings, growing nearer and dearer every time they did meet. And no small part of the honour in which she held him was due to the chivalrous manner in which he recognized her position with regard to himself. There were no surreptitious meetings in out-of-the-way places. If he could not always be at liberty on her only free-day, Sunday; when

he was he braved the eyes of the congregation at the Cathedral with her by his side, evidently as proud of his companion as if she had been "born in the purple;" and to prevent any possible misinterpretation he introduced her to more than one of his father's old friends as "Miss D'Anyer, my future wife."

Of course gossip made itself busy, and at first he had to encounter no small amount of raillery and banter from his brother officers in the garrison, anent his "devotion to the pretty young dressmaker;" but the promptness and decision with which he met a jest with the emphatic declaration "That lady is to be my *wife*, sirs," soon put a stop to it, without any attempt at bluster. Not that he was proud of Muriel's occupation, he would have been glad to obliterate the fact, but he loved her apart from and in spite of it, and it was a point of honour with him to place their mutual relations on the best footing.

Seeing that his association must either elevate or degrade, he took care there should be no mistake about the former.

All went well with the pair through the winter and the spring, and Mrs. Hopley, with an eye to her own interest, was less exacting than heretofore. But towards the close of July her manner underwent a sudden change, for which Muriel could in no way account. She, however, contrived to make matters indoors anything but pleasant for her apprentice; but the girl set it down to ill-humour consequent on bad trade, and the cares of a large family; always willing to find excuses for others. She was not given to trouble Arthur with her "petty annoyances and vexations," as she called them, or they might have compared notes, for about the same time he became conscious of a something intangible in the social atmosphere overshadowing their mutual association.

It was noteworthy, though neither noted the coincidence, that in the month of July Mrs. Wynne had again taken up her abode at the Plas by Sir Madoc's invitation.

Lady Jenkinson had, of course, gone to her husband's home a little farther south, and the

genial old man, finding the solitude of his large rooms intolerable, stifled his resentment and once more held out the hand of amity to his sister-in-law, decrepit though she was. She had so far benefitted by Buxton as to use her hands, and could play a game of cards or backgammon with him in the absence of guests.

Muriel had not been kept in ignorance of the revelations and changes in the Manchester family circle. Both from Mrs. Kingsley and her own mother, he had heard of her grandmother's discovery and consequent resolve; from the latter of her grandfather D'Anyer's decease, and his will, from which her father was all but excluded.

From Milly Hargraves long, wild, incoherent letters had come. Milly had sent them by a carrier to ensure delivery, though disguised as a parcel, to avoid and evade the heavy post-office penalty for infringement of right. But however conveyed, they brought only distress to sensitive Muriel, who, in the plenitude of her abundant love, could not

bear that another should be less happy than herself. The last of these conveyed the despairing intelligence that Robert had been coerced or deluded into marrying Ann Barber, and that Milly did not care what became of herself. Before Muriel was home again no doubt her fate would be sealed, and that she might be carried off into the wilds of Yorkshire, never to see anyone she loved again.

Muriel did her best to console poor Milly, though she had to sacrifice her night's rest to answer her; and she grieved that the best she could say would fall so meaningless on Milly's ear.

"It's well for you with a lover you adore waiting to marry you to tell me to be patient," Milly had written, and it made reply more difficult, for Muriel felt its truth.

Thus for many reasons there were shadows athwart the sunshine, and it was with a beating heart Muriel awaited that last arrival of her grandmother, it meant so much for her. She wondered how the old woman of

business would feel with no business on hand save to say farewell to people and places she had known so long. It would be a sad farewell, she was afraid.

Whatever her grandmother felt she kept it well covered up. She never held out her hand or voice for sympathy. She would never show that it was needed. But the twelve months had ploughed their way over her face heavily, if their burden had not bent her back. She still kept herself erect; and when she walked into Mrs. Hopley's showroom it was as one who might bend others but never bent herself.

Mrs. Bancroft did not have everything her own way. She went into Mrs. Hopley's showroom with quite an air of triumph; she came out of it with that rigid set of the face so common to it of late.

"Thah will miss thi apt embroideress," she had said, with exultation, when Muriel was upstairs taking leave of her associates.

"Nay," was the calm retort, "Miss D'Anyer has trained me a successor; and,"

Mrs. Hopley added in her loftiest manner, "I consider her acquaintance with Captain Wynne so discreditable, that I shall be glad to have the reproach on my establishment removed."

The old woman's brow contracted. "What dost th' mean?" she asked sternly.

The lofty composure of Mrs. Hopley was irritating. "I mean that Mrs. Wynne utterly repudiates her son's connection with *my apprentice*, and both she and Lady Jenkinson have withdrawn their patronage so long as Miss D'Anyer remains under my roof. Her removal, therefore, will be a gain to me, and probably to herself, if she be content to enter a family which will disown her."

"I do not believe one word of it," said Mrs. Bancroft, setting her teeth close.

"Perhaps you will believe *that*."

"*That*," was a perfumed but soiled billet from Mrs. Wynne or an amanuensis, couched in much the same language Mrs. Hopley had employed. Mrs. Wynne and Mrs. Hopley both had ignored the fact that Lady

Jenkinson's patronage could only be a possibility of the future, had never been in the past.

Mrs. Bancroft crushed the paper in her hand, and, the indentures having already been cancelled, turned without another word to hurry Muriel and her trunk out of the house, as if there was poison in its atmosphere.

To Muriel she said nothing, but was moody and snappish the rest of the day, evidently brooding over something in her own mind; and to the girl, longing for home news, and for something more, it was at once disturbing and perplexing.

When, as had been expected, Captain Wynne, full of hope, bent his tall and handsome head to enter the small low room at the Yacht Inn, where Mrs. Bancroft waited to receive him, with Muriel, trembling and uneasy, by her side, he was struck alike with the change in her aspect and demeanour.

Her old heartiness of manner was gone. She shook hands with him, and bade him

be seated, but with stiff propriety; and when he raised Muriel's hand to his lips in salutation, her brown eyes sought his appealingly, as if half afraid of a rebuke.

It was not until the captain, still keeping the little trembling fingers in his own, said cheerily,—

"Well, my dear madam, the year of probation is at an end, and now that all impediments are removed, I trust I may claim your promise and this priceless hand with a good grace"—not until then that Muriel knew the secret of her grandmother's mood.

"No, Captain Wynne," said the old woman sternly. "I appreciate thy constancy and freedom from prejudice fully; but *all* impediments are *not* removed. I and my grandchild have received an insult to-day which has raised up an insurmountable barrier. Until that is removed Muriel does not become thy wife with my consent. Read that!" and she flung his mother's crumpled note across the table to him.

As his eyes rested on the paper, they seemed to strike fire. He bit his lip, and gripped his hands, crushing the scented mischief-maker up much as she had done; but he waved back Muriel, who had risen to scan it also.

"No, my love, this is not for you. It is, indeed, an insult, madam,—doubly such coming through Mrs. Hopley to you. It is for me to deal with it. But I do trust you will not let the peevish irritability of a querulous and disappointed invalid come between me and Muriel. It is her happiness I seek as much as my own. My father will be proud to welcome her."

"Aye," interrupted Mrs. Bancroft, "thy father belike! But it's the womenfolk of a family that can sting a young wife like gnats if she be unwelcome. And meek as Muriel may be, she is none of John D'Anyer's daughter if she be, as Mrs. Hopley hinted, "content to enter a family that would disown her.'"

Muriel's face alternately flushed and paled,

her bosom rose and fell; love and pride were at war.

"Muriel?" questioned the lover, his warm, tight clasp upon her hand.

A timid "Arthur!" was all her low-voiced reply.

"What dost' say lass?" put the grandmother; adding plainly, "I've nought to say agen th' captain; but thou doesn't marry him to be scorned by his folk, with my consent."

"We must wait God's good time," gasped Muriel faintly. "Mrs. Wynne may change."

"My love, you cannot mean it," implored Arthur. "War may separate us,—send me away to a foreign station——"

"All the more reason you should wait, young sir. Would thah drag Muriel into a foreign land, and perhaps leave her there a widow? No! thah hast clenched the nail. You must wait."

Neither argument nor entreaty would move Sarah Bancroft from the stand she had taken. She left him in the room with Muriel for a

while, but it was only to seek and return with John D'Anyer, with his pride and wits aflame, to echo her opinions with emphasis; and if Arthur Wynne had found the pride of trade as strong as the pride of birth in the old furrier, he found both united in her haughty son-in-law.

There was a painful parting the next week; all the more painful because it was indefinite. They had buoyed themselves up with the prospect of an immediate marriage; and it is hard to say which felt the disappointment keenest. Muriel, feeling herself of small account at home, had hoped for a haven and rest in a husband's love; he for the pure and loving companionship he had never known. It was hard to bear. More than once he was tempted to ask her to become his without their consent, but he feared to risk her denial and disapproval.

Mrs. Hopley was passed over as beneath notice; but there was an unpleasant scene at the Plas with Mrs. Wynne, which ended in the final estrangement

of mother and son; and the lady had little reason for elation over what she called her "triumph," when she refused point blank to give him a "written retraction of her unjustifiable note," or a sanction of their union under her own hand, either; since in that refusal she lost her son.

Indeed, if she had no qualms of conscience, Owen, her maid, soon gave her cause to doubt her own policy.

"Look you, matam, you may pe glad to have so goot and kint a daughter py your chair some days pefore longs. Suppose I wass to get married and leave you, matam, look you! what then?"

"*You* married, my good Owen? at *your* age? Ridiculous!"

But there was a peculiar smile on the face at her back, as she saw it in the dressing-glass before her, which made her feel as if it were not so absurd as she supposed, and she found herself speculating what she would do, now Pauline was married and

gone, if Owen *should* leave her—leave her alone in her helplessness to strangers.

But she never once conceded that she had done wrong to separate her son and "that dressmaking girl," or that her note to Mrs. Hopley was, as he said, "unjustifiable."

Sarah Bancroft had, on the contrary, compunctious visitings whenever she looked on Muriel, whose serene eyes held depths of sorrowful thought which yet moved no complaining lips; but the old woman never dreamed of lowering her flag, or surrendering her grand-daughter to be scorned; and she was as mute as Muriel on all that concerned the Wynnes.

The return journey was a silent and miserable one. There had been a promised stoppage at Northwich to visit the newly-married Mrs. Asa Booth, and the good Doctor Holmes, but Sarah Bancroft was in no mood for anything but to hurry over the ground, and Muriel, who rode on a pillion behind Cutts, had neither care nor spirit to press the matter.

She too longed to be at home, to be her mother's informant, to seek counsel and sympathy from her; but she saw that she had her own burdens to bear, and would not add to them the weight of her young sorrow She spoke as cheerily as she could, and let none know how her heart ached under her smiling countenance, even the good mother scarcely divined all. And there is no doubt the effort to seem cheerful brought its own calm. There could be no fretfulness with reliance such as hers.

"It is only waiting, mother," she said; "I know Arthur will be true to me, and please God, it will all come right in the and."

"I hope so, my girl, I hope so," and Ellen D'Anyer turned away with a sigh, grieved at heart over the pride which held the happiness of two young hearts of no account, though she added, "and it is as well you have come home for a while; you have been away such a weary time."

And no doubt the mother had missed her,

for neither Anna nor Marion came as close to her in thought and feeling. Neither of them saw the loveliness of duty in the same degree; and neither was willing to make the sacrifices demanded by the pressure of the times, and circumstances, without open resentment and grumbling. Neither had the intuitive perception that the mother overtaxed herself to spare them; that the time Anna spent in gossip out of doors, or Marion in personal adornment before her looking-glass might have been better employed, either to save her or save others.

Muriel came wonderfully to the relief of all, in many ways; and Milly Hargreaves clung to her with wondering admiration and sympathy. Only she fancied Muriel's love for Arthur could not be as deep as her own for Robert—or her sorrow.

Their relatives were richer than themselves. John D'Anyer's sisters had all married men who either had money, or knew how to make it, and when the old manufacturer had died, at the beginning of the

year, the eldest son took the business, and little came to John's share. It was a sore disappointment. There was suspicion of chicanery, and much ill-feeling between the brothers and brothers-in-law.

Disappointment with John D'Anyer took an ill-form. He gulped down liquor to hide it, and then, in a spirit of bravado, added his father's trade to his own, not to be outdone. It caused a strain on his capital which he never wholly recovered, and had not Sarah Bancroft secretly come to his relief during the panic he must have gone to the wall.

Beside the commercial depression was the general scarcity of provisions. Pies and puddings had long been banished from the tables of the wealthy in order to cheapen flour for the poor, and a prohibition was laid on the manufacture of white bread.

For the same reason a tax was laid on hair-powder, and its use in the army abolished.

The very month after Muriel's return,

there was a disposition to repeat the rioting of the previous year, on account of the high prices of food.

Everywhere there was an enrolling or mustering of volunteers; colours to be presented, or balls in their honour; and there were always invitations for the handsome D'Anyer girls from their aunts or cousins for these shows. Then came the contest between the narrowed income and the desire to dress as well as their richer cousins; and I am afraid tears and ill-temper marred enjoyment when the new scarf or the new hat had to be denied.

Muriel had been a worker; and on one of these occasions she said it did not require three or four women besides a servant to keep the house in order; and she suggested that work for the warehouse should be done by herself and sisters, and that the money so earned might serve for their wardrobes and pocket-money; and so save their father's purse.

There was some demur at first, es-

pecially from Marion, but vanity prevailed over pride, and soon the three were back-stitching the stamped-leather tabs of braces (or gallows, as they were then called, or suspenders) in an upper-room, though the two were terribly afraid lest their useful occupation should get wind, and it was some time before even Milly Hargreaves was admitted to their secret. She, poor girl, on the eve of marriage with the undesirable John Stott, was loud in lamentation that she had no trade in her fingers whereby she could earn her own living.

"I only wish I had learned to make bonnets, or dresses, or stitch braces, or anything useful; I would have run away from home instead of marrying, if I could only have kept myself. I'm sure I envy Muriel, that I do," she said.

Her cousins, however, were not proud of their gifts in that respect, unless it might be Anna, who refused to see the advantage of class distinctions, and was given to talk to

her father's fustian-cutters more than was altogether necessary.

They always held themselves in readiness to receive visitors downstairs, or to go out for a promenade; but they never objected to leave Muriel behind at her stitchery, and when they had the materials were glad enough to fall back on the dress-making abilities of which they were so much ashamed. She appeared to take it all for granted; said to herself that "work was a remedy for a sore heart," that "people were sent into the world to be useful to each other," and was rather pleased than otherwise to be left alone. And after Milly Hargreaves was carried off into Yorkshire as the wife of John Stott, bargained for as much as a bale of goods on the Exchange, Muriel was very much alone, Sara, on her inspiriting, having begun to relieve her over-tried mother in household matters not in Betty's province.

Her aunts as well as her sisters seemed to think that Muriel had been sent into the world to play the part of "general utility,"

especially her aunt Bent, who, whether regardless or regardful of her son Joe's aspirations, wanted Muriel at the Grange at all times and seasons, but more especially when a room, or a dress, or a table needed particular decoration; she was "so obliging." "Too obliging," her grandmother said, with the addendum, "thanks empty nobody's purse."

But Muriel was always ready when Joe came to drive her there in the gig—no, not always. There were long letters coming from time to time, and when these came she shut herself in her own room to answer them as she best could, for her heart and her obedience were at variance, and many were her secret tears, many her secret prayers for guidance and support, whilst her quill went over her paper. Through all Arthur's letters ran the one appeal, "Be my wife, Muriel; I am lonely without you," but she could never say she had the consent of her elders, and "I cannot make them unhappy by marrying without it. We must wait," was in every reply.

The three sisters were hard at work upstairs, in the critical year '98, on some spring goods for a London order, when a knock at the street door announced a stranger; a friend would have turned the handle to walk in.

It was a visitor for Miss D'Anyer.

Down went needle, brace-web, leather; off went the great apron; there was a momentary adjustment of curls, and downstairs went Muriel to be caught to the heart of Arthur Wynne with all the rapture of a lover long parted from the idol of his adoration.

Her nerves were strung up to patient resignation, but the unexpected joy overpowered her, and she sobbed upon his bosom in the very overflow of gladness. They were not sad tears, however, and as he seemed content to kiss them away, she was tranquilized ere long, and ready to lend an ear to all he had to say.

It was the old story. He longed to make her his wife without delay; but there was

now an addition of urgency to the well-known plea.

The regiment, he said, were expecting orders to embark for Holland or Belgium. How long he might be away, how long the campaign would last, he could not tell; but he could not leave her in uncertainty. He prayed her to become his wife, and go with him. The major, his father, would be a double protection to her, and all possible provision should be made for her comfort. And he listened for her answer as if life and death hung on her words.

He could scarcely have come with a worse argument for the surrender of Muriel. Not that she herself would demur, she was willing to travel the world with him, and with her head upon his breast she told him so. But she was not of age and the decision did not rest with herself. She could only refer him to her elders, and fearful of their veto, she was loth to break in upon the blissful dream of the present, in which the light of his eyes, the tones of his voice held her enthralled.

There had been no necessity to proclaim throughout the house who Muriel's visitor was; his uniform would have told that, had his features not been familiar even to Betty through a miniature which had been substituted in Chester for the crystal locket. So that when Muriel's first outburst of emotion had subsided, and she was ready to announce his presence to her mother and father, and introduce him to her sisters, they were all prepared to meet him.

And so long as he forbore to make his errand known his reception was most cordial. But with that came a general chill. No one was willing to part with Muriel *now*. Even John D'Anyer had begun to realize the value of his daughter. And with the war prospect before them timid, gentle little Mrs. D'Anyer, who had formerly put in a word for the lovers deprecatory of the pride which would sacrifice their happiness to the satisfying of a vain doll like Mrs. Wynne, even she ceased to advocate the match, with the sights, and sounds, and horrors of coming warfare in

view. She loved her child too well to consign her to such perils.

In the midst of the discussion Mrs. Bancroft came, and again the question was put, and again the reasons given, and again the captain's voice was drowned. The word "Holland" might have scared them.

"A sea voyage in a troopship, a campaign in that land of mud and dykes. It was not to be thought of," said one and all—not Muriel, she looked wistfully from one to the other, and clung to him, and said if there was danger she would elect to share it.

But down came Grandmother Bancroft's foot, "I'll see thah do nothing so foolish. You are both young enough to wait, and I think, Captain Wynne, thah would be more sensible, and show more real love for the lass, by leaving her in comfort and safety with her friends instead of dragging her into danger. She don't go with my consent."

There was nothing either imposing or impressive about the manufacturer's house in Broom Street, and the captain must have

been wofully in earnest and devotedly in love to stand the many rebuffs he met and remain unchanged.

Muriel's heart bled for him as well as for herself. The sun had been shining when she had entered the parlour and found him gazing on her embroidered portrait, on which a sunbeam rested; but clouds had overcast the sky, and an atmosphere of damp and discomfort had seemed to come in with her Grandmother Bancroft.

Muriel turned her brown eyes pleadingly towards her; though her trembling hand never once left Arthur's clasp—and the look must have disturbed the old woman, for though she shook her head, and said, "No, no, my lass, I can't suffer thee to go to be killed, with either fright, or cold, or famine, or sword, or bullet!" she added, "Let the captain sell out, or exchange and stay in England, we're like to have fighting enough here ere long—and I'll not gainsay him; he may have thee and welcome!"

And then, muttering something about

taking off her wet cloak she marched off into the back room as a sort of hint for the others to follow; in truth uncomfortable over the aspect of affairs, and even over her own decision. But she did not change it, and if any doubts of her own infallibility were rising in her mind no one else was the wiser.

Selling out or exchanging were out of the question, and so Arthur said to Mr. D'Anyer, when, declining all proffers of refreshment, he shook hands with them one by one as they left the room, glad to be once more, for however brief a space, alone with Muriel—and with his disappointment.

He with all the untried British soldier's confidence of success, made light of the dangers to be encountered. "Do you think, my darling, I could have been so selfish and cruel as to drag you into danger and discomfort. The wives of other officers and men will accompany the troops. Think you it would be allowed if *they* were not to be cared and provided for. Oh, Muriel, my love,

my love, you must not think me so selfishly devoid of thought or care for you. Mrs. Bancroft is mistaken. *You* would not wish me to sell out at such a crisis, would you?" and as he held her close he looked into her eyes for her reply.

They fell before his own, her answer was long in coming.—"I cannot think of war without a shudder. That the passions of men or nations should rise so high as to make bloodshed patriotism is to me terrible. Yet seeing that our country is threatened, and that even peaceable tradesmen are arming in its defence, what can I say to you who are a soldier? Being a soldier your first duty is to your King and country. How could I ask you to set that duty aside and bring the stigma of cowardice on an honourable name, only that you might make me your wife a little earlier? I did not love you because you were a soldier, Arthur, but in spite of it; for all that was good and noble and chivalrous in your conduct. Do you think I should love you better if you sold out for my sake?

Nay, I should think you had tarnished your honour, and were no longer my Prince Arthur."

"These are brave words, my Muriel, and with my whole heart I thank you for them. They take some of the bitterness from parting." And as he spoke, he looked down into the clear brown eyes that once more were raised to his, and pressed a kiss upon her brow as much of homage as of affection.

Brave words were hers no doubt, but they were not easy to say, and poor Muriel had need of all her Christian fortitude, for she found obedience hard, and very white were the lips with which she bade him farewell, and promised to be faithful whatever might betide: though they little foresaw all that would betide when he tore himself away.

"I may be months, nay, years away, my Muriel," he said, at last. "Can your constancy endure the long separation?"

"It matters not months or years, Arthur. True love does not measure time or distance save in heart beats and anxiety. Fidelity

is not so much a virtue as a necessity. Change with me is impossible. You will find me still the same," she whispered, looking up tenderly through the tears which had began to flow.

"But a soldier's life is uncertain, my love. What if I never come back?"

"Hush!" and her lips blanched. "Do not suggest such a terror. I shall never marry until you do. You *must* come back. I will pray for you night and day."

"Aye, do, my own, God bless you! Muriel, God bless you!"

The straining clasp relaxed; he was gone, his last kiss on her pale and quivering lips; the skies wept over him, and she wept for him.

CHAPTER IX.

SARAH BANCROFT'S WILL.

MRS. BANCROFT'S experience inclined her to suspect that the disappointed Fusilier Captain might steal a march upon them, and run off with Muriel when least expected, so in order to guard against such a contingency, she carried her off to Red Bank, and scarcely allowed the girl out of her sight.

She took care at the same time to let her know the great things she would do for her if she kept single a year or too, and married with her approbation, whether Arthur Wynne or someone else.

Since Sam had got into disgrace the three hundred a-year promised to Muriel on her marriage had expanded into five; and her grandmother did not fail to tell her of it,

or that she would forfeit all if she married against her wish, as Sam had done.

She need not have taken so many precautions. Arthur Wynne was of too noble a nature to suggest a runaway marriage to the girl he loved, even though he exercised the right of his manhood in the selection of a wife; and though at one time sorely tempted, he had too much respect both for her and himself to make such a proposal; indeed had he done so, Muriel's filial obedience and affection would have taken alarm and opposed him, and he knew it. But he would have risked the loss of marriage-portion could he have made her his wife without it, although he was neither so rich nor so simple as to despise the fortune Muriel was likely to bring.

It was part of Sam's punishment to know that a new will had been made, from which he was excluded, and that Ellen and her children were to have so much on which he had reckoned as his own. That his own boy James was provided for was no satis-

faction to him. His only satisfaction came from the handling of the crisp bank notes when the partnership closed, and he knew that the thousands were his own.

The natural bent of the man then was shown. He threw off the sober garb, the sober, thrifty habits he had worn so long in the eye of day and of his mother; "determined to cut a dash and enjoy himself."

Lydia could have told long before had she been so minded, how he had commonly cast off his business suit, and his business manners with business hours, and to what his frequent headaches might have been attributed. But she had been warned to hold her peace; so she kept out of his mother's way, and that of others, seldom going beyond her own door-step save to the adjoining church or market, lest she should let slip some unlucky word or other. He had burdened her life with secrets from the first.

Few traces of the buxom country lass were now to be found in Mrs. Samuel Ban

croft; she had shed too many tears over her secret marriage and her unacknowledged boy, and but for her little girl her life would have been dreary indeed. Sam took care it was not much more cheerful for the visits she paid to Red Bank, whether to receive his money or to see her son.

In the newness of his exasperation (for Sam considered and maintained *he* was the injured individual, not his mother, whose fortune he had helped to make), Lydia's husband would have debarred her acceptance of the privilege to see her boy; but he thought better of it, and ere long Lydia and even little James became in his hands innocent and unconscious spies on the mother who had cast him off.

There is no doubt that casting off had stung him almost as much as the loss it involved, and every fresh token of favour to the D'Anyers roused him to a pitch of savage jealousy.

It was not long after Captain Wynne's departure that he heard how much his

mother had settled on Muriel and on her sisters, and he swore with many an oath they should not have it.

Muriel was still with her grandmother; she had taken on herself the arduous task to net a crimson scarf for her soldier lover before he was called away, and late and early the stitches grew upon her mesh, and her netting needle flew until her fingers were cut and sore with the running silk. It was completed and despatched. The hasty letter which acknowledged its receipt told also that the route had come, and they were to sail for Ostend on the morrow. They would be on the sea when it reached her.

Muriel had carried the letter to her own room to be kissed and wept over with none to scan or rebuke; she had flung herself upon her knees in incoherent prayer for her dear one's safety, and was rising to her feet when she fancied she heard a sound of scuffling below, and then a fall.

There was a moment's wonder what it

might mean, then a hurried rush downstairs, a glimpse of a familiar figure flying through the hall, a clash of the front door.

A moment more she was in the parlour calling "Margery! Margery!" in a voice that was like a shriek.

She had found her grandmother stretched senseless on the floor, the semi-circular door of the corner cupboard wide open, the old lady's bright steel girdle-chain dangling and swinging from the bunch of keys in the lock; a chair overturned beneath the high cupboard.

Muriel was on her knees, with the capless white head of her grandmother resting on her bosom, when Margery came darting in fresh from the wash-tub, her arms all suds.

In, too, came James from school, crying; his breeches, cap, and books all muddy, his slate broken.

"He's knocked me down and broke——" The cry stopped and sank to an affrighted whisper, as he saw his grandmother with closed eyes and a white face being lifted from

the carpet to the sofa, and Muriel almost as white.

"Was father running for a doctor when he upset me?" he asked.

"Your *father*, James? Was that your father ran out of the house," cried Muriel in a panic.

"Aye," said the lad, in open-eyed wonder.

Muriel and Margery exchanged glances as they laid their burden down, and began to chafe the old hands, in one of which was a white rag. Samuel Bancroft had been forbidden to cross the threshold. What did it all mean?

In the midst of her distress and their unavailing efforts to restore consciousness, this question kept recurring to Muriel's mind. "What does it all mean?" The answer came all too soon.

Someone ran for a doctor, though it was not Sam. He was nowhere visible.

A neighbour to whom Jem had run in a fright, had done their errand.

Sarah Bancroft's eyes had unclosed before

the doctor came; but though they roved around and rested on the corner cupboard with a troubled expression, her lips remained sealed.

Many were the questions asked and answered, for the doctor himself could not read the symptoms by intuition, and there seemed to him nothing on the surface.

No, there was no accounting for her fall, though there was a bruise on her shoulder, and another on her wrist, and this, the doctor said, was like the impression of a grasping hand.

"She was a hearty woman for her years." "Was not troubled with either vertigo or syncope." "Never had an ailment within knowledge." "Was not resting on the back of her head." "Had not struck the furniture in her fall." "Had not been sick." "Must have been reading, for the big Bible was open on the table, with her spectacles laid upon it." "Might have fallen from the chair; it lay overturned beneath the open cupboard, as he might see."

The doctor was perplexed. His patient's system had sustained a shock; but whether the fall was the result of the shock, or the shock the result of the fall, was more than he could determine. His remedy was the same —blood-letting. It was no remedy for the shock she had sustained. A shock more mental than physical, but to this no one there had a clue.

A messenger was despatched to Broom Street, and soon Ellen D'Anyer was there to share with Muriel the anxious watch by the bedside, where was never a hope to cheer, never a token how the hale woman had come by her disaster.

It was all a doubt, a question, and a mystery.

The sufferer was alive, but made no sign of understanding or recognition. She took no sustenance, seemed unable to swallow. Only a feather dipped in diluted brandy was drawn from time to time between her lips.

John D'Anyer and other members of the family came and went, and the doctor was

in and out, but nothing more could be done, nothing more was known.

And nothing would induce Muriel to leave the room even for an hour. A supernatural power of existing without sleep seemed to be hers.

"I have been used to sitting up night and day," she said, "and now I could not sleep. Grandmother might wake and need me."

Indeed, if she chanced to drop into a doze in her chair, in five or ten minutes she was awake again with all her faculties alert. "A born nurse," Mrs. Kingsley had pronounced her years before; and here she was proving it, in her care of the grandmother who had so hastily resented the epithet as an imputation. All that was past and forgotten; and if the white head retained any impression of the past, or of the gentle ministrant to her few needs, no one could tell.

A week, ten days went by; the impassive patient was evidently sinking.

"Had we not better send for Uncle Sam?"

suggested Muriel by her bedside, to her mother.

A struggle seemed to convulse Sarah Bancroft's frame, a spark of the old fire to light up her sunken eyes. Some deep excitement broke the seal upon her lips. "Sam? No!" she jerked out emphatically. Then fainter, whilst wondering and anxious eyes and ears were alert, she went on,—"Sam—knocked—old mother—down.———Keys—stole—cupboard—deeds———" and then the voice trailed off into indistinctness. Her lips were wetted with brandy. Her thin veiny hand went wandering over the coverlet, as if in search of something. "Muriel—better marry—young captain—*now*. Ellen—Muriel—forgive—sorry."

Again a pause. The hand again went wandering.

"Muriel—where are you?" Muriel laid her beautiful young hand under the old and withered one. There was a feeble indication of a clasp. Pray—pray for—grandmother—Sam—forgive tresp—God's will—be done!"

Sarah Bancroft had surrendered her own will at last, and her life with it.

When all was over Muriel might have succumbed to the excessive strain on her nerves and sensibilities, but for fresh demands on her thought and energies.

Her father might make all arrangements for the funeral, but there was a family of females to be put into mourning, and who so fit to undertake this, even if she did call her sister's needles into requisition? The very necessity to turn her thoughts into other directions acted as a safety valve, and kept her from brooding over the double loss of lover and grandmother. Still, as her scissors or her pins ran through bombazine, or crape, or calico, she could but think of them both, and of her grandmother's tardy consent to the union now impossible, and again to wonder if her Uncle Samuel had really been the cause of his mother's death?

Aye, it was Sam's doing, that was certain.

James had seen him rush from the house. There was the dying woman's own declara-

tion. In clearing the neglected parlour for the funeral, the bit of white rag Margery had removed from her clutch was found under the sofa. It was a torn piece of a man's falling neck tie. Margery knew it well.

"I saw it wur Mester Sam's as soon as I clapped eyes on it!" she said.

Sam's doing! It was clear there had been a quarrel and a struggle, but for what? And where was Sam?

He had "not been home for three days," Lydia said, when she went in great perturbation to Red Bank to look for him the very day his mother died, unaware that the old woman, who had been kind to her, was no more. He "had come home in a great fluster and a queer temper ten days before, and had sworn at her when she noticed that his neck-tie was torn; and there had been something mysterious going on with him and their neighbour, Mr. Garratt, the corn chandler, ever since, and somehow she felt afraid."

She might well be, for neither she nor her

little ones ever saw Sam again. And ere long she had no alternative but to break up her home in Toad Lane and go back to her father and the farm at Waverham.

Her anxious enquiry for her husband supplemented the disjointed revelation of the dying woman, and helped with other fragmentary evidence to prove the main facts.

The struggle had evidently been for the old woman's keys; for the chain was broken, and had been torn from her girdle, and a tin box had disappeared from the cupboard. It did not contain Mrs. Bancroft's will, that was found with other private papers in the old bureau; but it held the title-deeds of valuable properties,—might have held all, but for her belief in the old adage, "Never put too many eggs in one basket;" and its loss was not discovered until after the reading of the will, which disinherited Sam, and left Ellen Bancroft sole executrix.

Then Muriel remembered that her eye had been arrested by the vacant place on the shelf,—had missed a familiar object; but in

the double anguish and perturbation of the hour she had not given it a second thought.

With that box had gone all prospect of wealth for the D'Anyers.

Sam had made good use of his time, if he had not been preparing long beforehand to clutch the property. He had sold not only the freehold of the clump of houses in Toad Lane and Fennel Street to the corn-chandler Garratt for a mere song, but the Red Bank premises and other properties elsewhere, to a stranger who had been in treaty with Mrs. Bancroft herself for the deserted workshops. Little remained but a cluster of houses at Ancoats, the farm at Waverham, her shares in the Manchester Hall, Chester, and her balance in the New Manchester Bank, the latter considerably reduced by sums recently drawn out for investment of which not a trace remained. Whether the securities had been locked in the tin deed-box could never be ascertained

Its effect was most disastrous on John D'Anyer.

Not so much in the loss of prospective competence. He could be no worse off for want of that which had never been his. Not altogether for lack of the ready hand when he had bills falling due and was likely to be pressed for funds, for whatsoever Sarah Bancroft lent he had been wont to repay to the full. But for its moral bearing, in the violence done to his family pride, to his human instincts, as well as for his own disappointment, and the rage it engendered.

In railing at his brother-in-law for the outrage he had committed, and in seeking vengeance on him he neglected his own proper concerns, at a time when an Englishman's business demanded his closest attention.

It was in vain that his wife and Muriel reminded him, "Vengeance is *mine*, saith the Lord, *I* will repay." Remonstrance was thrown away upon him.

He carried a pistol about with him and vowed he would "shoot his thief of a brother-in-law," and for two years that loaded pistol was kept ready in his breast pocket.

He was saved the guilt of blood on his soul, for Sam never came in his way.

Whether pursued by remorse, or fear of detection, or simply from an eager longing to escape with his prey, he had fled; and that before a full knowledge of *all* he had done could have been more than a stinging prescience to him. Yet he had left his white-haired mother on the floor, and could not be ignorant of the probable consequences.

The questioning of an acquaintance on the strange occurrence, and his mother's peculiar condition, must have aroused an alarm in his breast. It was ascertained that he, in haste to depart, leaving wife and children behind, had bought a horse at Hyde's Cross for fifty pounds, and sold it with broken knees in Liverpool for ten, the day after. And when, unknown to him, his mother died and his sin was revealed, he was on his way to America with his ill-gotten gains. Whether they met with a French cruiser or privateer by the way, or went to the bottom in a storm, nothing sure was ever

heard of the ship in which he sailed, or of him.

Lydia wept over his departure, and met his accusers and abusers with the conviction that "he would have been another and a better man but for his mother's constant preaching that saving and money-making were the end and aim of life, and that no man had a right to marry until he had made a fortune."

"If instead of wedding on the sly as he was almost forced to do by her queer notions, he had married me openly and brought me home, I might have helped him to save and make the money he was so fond of," she said to John D'Anyer. "What it cost to keep them Blackburns quiet, there's no telling; and he was like a ramping madman about the house when he was let in for paying a lawyer to tell lies for the rogues. No, Sam was what his mother made him, dead and gone though she be. And whether I ever see him again, or I don't, I shall ever say it."

So someone had faith even in Sam, that he was not all bad, and might have been better; and she, the one who had known him at his best, and at his worst, and who had suffered most through him and by him.

And in that faith let us leave her in her uncertain widowhood, to train the children he had left, and to work for them and her old father with unflagging perseverance to the end, a good wife and a good mother, and, barring the one great error of her life, not a bad daughter. Waverham knew nothing of her husband's misdeeds, and she was careful to keep the knowledge from his children.

Before she had fairly turned her back on the home which had held so much misery for her, John D'Anyer had commenced litigation for the recovery of the property. The case went to trial; and though there was a clause in the will that "Ellen D'Anyer's receipt should be the discharge thereof," and the holders could show but the receipt of Samuel Bancroft, they held the original title-deeds, and the property had otherwise been

legally transferred, and that before the death of the testatrix had given finality to her will.

The conveyancer, a lawyer who had taken fees on *both* sides, and had obtained under false pretences the signature of Ellen D'Anyer to papers she should not have signed, narrowly escaped being struck off the rolls, the judge threatening him for his rascality in court; and though he gave judgment for the parties who had bought and paid for the property, he also gave leave to move for a new trial.

But law is a costly luxury, and these protracted lawsuits had so impoverished the D'Anyers that no further action was possible, though many friends and advisers,—one a young lawyer often to be seen in the Broom Street parlour, named Jonathan Booth, —counselled otherwise, and prophesied victory.

Amongst these were Bob and Joe Bent, the former of whom was married, to the satisfaction of father and mother if not to his own, and in practice, with a fine estate in

prospect, on the demise of his wife's father; the latter of whom, Joe, had exchanged into the Light Horse Volunteers, and came on his gaily caparisoned steed, leaping over the guardian chains of Broom Street gentility, as if to take the avenues to Muriel's heart by storm also, with his new uniform and higher rank. He was no longer a corporal but a cornet, and gave much more time to his regimental drill and parade than he did to the factory and cotton-spinning.

Joe could not believe in a woman's love outlasting years of absence and silence; and, when nothing was heard of Captain Wynne, said to her, "Ah, Muriel, you had better have put up with a plain Lancashire lad like me;" but he did not torment her.

"If I bother her she's likely to send me about my business as Anna sent her unfortunate swain the other day," he argued with himself, "she'll maybe think better of it and change her mind before long."

But when he saw how anxiously and wistfully she listened to the various scraps

and driblets of war news brought into the house, and watched the new expression which deepened on her countenance, as the months rolled by he began to think differently. Still he was not disposed to give up hope for himself in the end. "Never's a long day, and patience is a winning horse," was his consolation, but patience did not seem to bring him much nearer to the winning post.

Sarah Bancroft's dying permission for Muriel to marry Arthur Wynne had come all too late. And well it had. His company was one of the two companies of Fusiliers Major-General Coote landed, with other forces, to destroy the sluices in the canal at Ostend; and when Sarah Bancroft was being carried to her grave in the Old Churchyard, he and his father were being marched to Lisle with the remnant of their men as prisoners of war; so soon had the campaign come to an end for them.

Muriel knew it not. Defeats are not trumpeted abroad; they only are buzzed

about in whispers, and details are hard to get at, or they were in the days when there was neither steam, nor telegraphy, when the post was uncertain, and the press in its infancy.

Muriel had the sickening ache of uncertainty at her heart; but her hope and faith had sure anchorage; there was no feeble yielding to despair on the first alarm; and home anxieties were so pressing she was afraid to add to her mother's troubles by any visible token of her own. Only on her knees could she pour them forth into the ever open ear of her Lord, and only from Him could come the strength to bear them with composure.

Joe was chivalrous in his way. The serenity with which she went about her household duties, the celerity with which her needle flashed, the calmness with which she set self aside to secure any trifle of enjoyment or adornment for his sisters, did not deceive *him*. He saw that the silence of Arthur Wynne lay heavy at her heart, and

set about gaining intelligence of his rival to lighten it. Brave Joe!

He had long been admitted to the arcana of the private work-room, now more than ever a necessity, and feeding his hopeless flame the while, sat and read to his cousins, whilst they stitched away far into the candle-lit night. He had always brought them driblets of news from without, of the rebellion in Ireland, the Reign of Terror in France, warlike activity at home; and now he never lost sight of the Welsh Fusiliers. Now it was an exchange of the prisoners at Lisle; anon it was their removal to head-quarters in Guernsey; again, after a lapse, it was the expected return of the regiment to England.

A letter from Arthur Wynne himself that came like rain in the parched desert followed this, and told of letters despatched home and to her which must have miscarried, of inability to leave even for a day, and of the coming embarkation with Sir Ralph Abercrombie's army for Holland.

She had at least time for a reply and it went, to be to her lover all his letter had been to her. Joe brought word that the troopships had left the Downs. This was in August, 1799.

The next news was of a tedious and tempestuous voyage; of a difficult landing effected in face of the enemy; of a battle fought with varying success, in which, however, was no report of wound or scathe to Major or Captain Wynne, and he made the most of this.

Joe had next to tell the unpalatable news of the withdrawal of the British troops from Holland, and their removal with the women and children in Dutch schuyts to the English line-of-battle ships lying fifteen miles off the coast. But he did not tell that the *Valk*, with part of those troops, was missing, since two companies of the Welsh Fusiliers, including Major and Captain Wynne, had embarked in her.

It was some time after, when suspicion had become certainty, and the story of the very

few survivors was made known, that Joe, with a delicacy born of his forlorn attachment, called Muriel alone into the front parlour, and broke to her gently the catastrophe of the storm-tossed *Valk*, which, after driving almost ashore on Yarmouth sands, was beaten back to rocky Norway, and finally went to pieces off the coast of Ameland, flinging human lives like wrack upon the waters. Nineteen out of the hundreds on board had been cast ashore, but neither Major Wynne nor his brave son were of these.

Muriel had listened with eager questioning in those big brown eyes of hers.

"*Lost, all, Arthur, lost!*" she gasped, her face white as ashes, and then it dropped on her hands and the sofa-arm as if lightning-struck.

Joe went out and closed the door behind him, then after a while sent her mother to comfort her. In about an hour Muriel went upstairs, and was seen no more that night.

She put on no mourning-robes. "My sorrow needs no livery," she said, "and my

loss is not to be told in bombazine and crape."

Nor did she give way to moaning or lamentation; and only that her face continued white and sober, and her manner more than ever subdued, none would have guessed she had so deep a sorrow at her heart. Indeed, had self-repression not been part of her nature, her active desire to serve others would have kept her from brooding by finding occupation both for hands and head. When Anna and Marion threw down their work and needles, declaring they were "not going to be slaves for anybody," she kept quietly at her task. And both by precept and example she stimulated little Sara to be, as she called it, "Mother's right hand in the kitchen," as she herself had long been *everywhere*.

John D'Anyer made no mistake in saying that his daughters were a "fine set of girls," for Muriel now came in for her share of the admiration that followed the sisters whithersoever they went, and certainly her

voice had added some musical notes to their hours of song; then, notwithstanding their father's struggles against the great commercial pressure, they—at least Anna and Marion—dressed well, as the word is commonly understood; and not only their father, but Aunt Bent encouraged them in this.

"Tchut! Let them dress, it is necessary to maintain our position, if I am but a beggars' inkle weaver. To be poor and seem poor is ruination!" was his dictum.

"If they earn gold let them wear gold," said Mrs. Bent to her husband, who, knowing something of his brother-in-law's difficulties, had made a remark on their attire during a ball at the Grange, given to a number of volunteer officers, and others. "I know I should not care to see John's girls about me worse dressed than our other nieces, and besides, they cost less than you think,—all that embroidery was Muriel's work, and the dressmaking too. They're downright hard-working lasses, and will make good wives, if they are a bit dressy. And

as for Muriel, she's a treasure! She was helping cook all yesterday with cakes and jellies, and trimmed my dress and my cap this morning, and look at her now in that simple white muslin, and not an ornament but that everlasting locket-miniature! I only wish she would take to our Joe."

"But she won't," said Charles Bent. "Muriel's heart is filled."

"Ah! so I'm afraid. She cares to go nowhere. I don't think she would have consented to come into the room to-night if Joe had not told her that we expected Lieutenant Hill, and she hoped to get some particulars of the wreck of the Dutch ship, that sweetheart of hers went down with. She clings to the belief that Captain Wynne was not drowned with the rest."

"Then Joe was a fool for his pains. If he wants the lass himself why should he help to keep the old memory alive?" quoth her husband.

"Well, it's likely enough Joe expects to

convince her the captain has gone to the bottom."

"H'm, he'd best have let well alone! Look how eagerly she is listening to all the lieutenant has to say, with her lips parted and white as her cheeks;" and Mr. Bent crossed the room to listen too.

Lieutenant Hill, one of the survivors of the ill-fated *Valk*, was recounting, no doubt, for the hundred-and-fiftieth time, the story of his shipwreck and rescue, telling it too like a well-worn tale to a group of attentive listeners in the great bay window, until a question put to him by a young lady with a face as colourless as her own frock, who had hitherto kept well within the shadow of the heavy velvet curtain, aroused him to the consciousness that one of his hearers had a personal interest in his narrative.

He had gone at length through the transfer from the schuyt to the frigate, the close packing of the unwieldy old vessel with four hundred and forty-six souls, men, women, and children, the wounded and the sick, all

huddled together, ill provided with common comforts for a *quick* passage across of a few hours' duration; and then the miserable beating about for *twelve* days in the fogs and storms of November, with not a mention of the name for which her ear was strained.

"Major Wynne and his son, Captain Wynne, were on board, were they not?" was uttered anxiously, it may be, hopefully.

A quick, sharp glance at the questioner, and then the narrator's voluble speech took another turn and tone.

"Yes, young lady, but the major was unfortunately wounded, he had lost a leg, and lay in a blanket on the forecastle with others in as sorry plight. The captain acted as his deputy; was here, there, and everywhere, endeavouring to infuse hope and courage into the sinking hearts of the men. Now down in the hold with Lieutenant Hoggart and a file of men working at the pumps, then with the crying women and children aft, making arrangements for their safety in

case the frigate parted." "God bless him!" trembled on Muriel's pallid lips, in an undertone audible only to Joe, close by her side. "He was there when I saw him last. We were then fast on the sand bank, the waves beating against the frigate's sides and over her decks as if all Neptune's sea-horses were riding over us to trample us down. All at once there was a shock, a sound of tearing and riving, and I knew the timbers of the *Valk* were rending asunder. For my own safety I rushed to the forecastle, as the vessel tore in two and her mainmast fell crushing and crashing the lives out of shrieking sailors and soldiers, their wives and little ones. For a moment I had caught a glimpse of the brave captain, as if about to spring across the opening gulf to join his father; then the mast fell and the afterpart of the ship was gone—he and all its freight of lives were lost in the boiling surge."

"Water," cried someone, "Miss D'Anyer has fainted."

Joe's ready shoulder supported her head,

his disengaged hand opened the casement, drew the curtain before her for a screen, and waved intruders back.

In a few moments she revived.

The interrupted narrative was being finished farther away.

"Joe," said she, with her hand on her side, "I should like to ask Lieutenant Hill a question or two, will you bring him here after a while?"

"To be sure, if you think you won't faint again." And Joe watched his opportunity.

"Sir," said she, "I did not hear how you were rescued. Was it not possible that Major Wynne and his son were also saved?"

"I wish I could say otherwise, but indeed it was not possible! I had thrown myself flat on the forecastle, and saw with horror the afterpart break up, and the ill-fated crowd go down shrieking and clinging to each other, some swept away amongst rigging, some struck dead by beams or bolts. I never saw Captain Wynne again, he must have gone down at first. As for the poor major!

What chance was there for a maimed man in such a tumult of waters? The forecastle did not hold together long. I had barely time to fasten myself to a portion of the lighter woodwork, and on that I reached the shore. Neither Captain nor Major Wynne were amongst the fortunate few the good-natured Dutch fishermen found on that barren island of Ameland, and there was not a boat in sight to pick a straggler up. I am sorry, young lady, to be the bearer of no better news, since I perceive the two gallant officers were your friends, but 'better a finger aff than one aye wagging;' it's always best to know the worst, to my mind. Mrs. Wynne gave them up at once."

"Gave them up." It was not until Lieutenant Hill spoke as a survivor and an eye witness, that Muriel knew how much she had clung to Hope. His words seemed to crush and stun her, but she did not faint again; and from that night no one heard the name of Arthur Wynne from her lips.

Marion and Anna surrounded by fluttering

beaux at the other end of the long dancing-room where a footman was handing wine and jellies round on a silver salver, heard nothing of this, being more congenially engaged; and when informed by their Uncle Bent that Muriel had fainted, were not particularly sympathetic.

"She should have stayed at home," was all they had to say.

And in future, she did.

CHAPTER X.

HOW IT ENDED.

IT goes without telling that these fine well-dressed girls of Mr. D'Anyer's had fully their share of admirers; as a natural consequence they were hard to please, treating their adorers somewhat cavalierly.

There was a rumour afloat that one of the sisters had so driven a suitor to distraction, that he put an end to his life and his despair in his own fishpond. However this might be Marion was ambitious, looked high for an eligible offer, and thought the world was at her feet. Anna had no such lofty aspirations, but she seemed indifferent to flattery and turned with scorn from a red-coat. *She* was a puzzle to Muriel, who, keeping all her agony and shattered hopes to herself, smiled pleasantly on all alike

without affectation, and without a thought of conquest.

But, ere the new century had got firm foothold, the long delayed crash came. John D'Anyer was a bankrupt! And oh! the shame and the disgrace to him!

The failure of a large London firm he had credited too freely, and the stoppage by war of his American trade brought it about. His creditors met. The cause was apparent, others were in like case, or might be any day; and such was their belief in his integrity that he was permitted to receive all and pay all himself, and time allowed to him for the payment. But in spite of this, and though he paid twenty shillings in the pound, he never recovered the shock, or the disgrace. Indeed, an attack of paralysis was the immediate consequence. From this he rallied, but was never his old self.

And now he learned to value his eldest girl, and she to estimate her grandmother's forethought in tying down her bequests to Ellen and her girls.

What Sam and the law had left to *her* in cash was her own now she was of age. This she devoted to the clearing of her father's liabilities.

"I could not put the money to more honourable purpose," she said, "and my father's good name is the breath of life to him."

Then she took a house *herself* in Portland Street (a wide thoroughfare only partially built, with patches of verdure between the blocks), and not far from her Aunt Fawcett's, and bending to circumstances gave out to the wealthy relatives who had so often taxed her skill gratuitously, that she was about to turn mantua-maker in earnest, and to train her sisters as assistants.

"The property at Ancoats," she said to them, "will preserve mother and father from feeling their dependence, and we must leave no stone unturned to keep them in comfort. I thank God *now* that grandmother did place me with Mrs. Hopley. I think she must have foreseen this. And it is quite as well I

did not marry and go away." But though they heard her sigh, they did not hear the "Alas, poor dear Arthur," which finished her speech mentally.

So brave an effort met with the success it merited; and though Marion's pride revolted at working for hire, for strangers as well as for their own aunts and cousins, Anna and Sara turned to with a will, and they soon were hard at work, Muriel measuring, fitting, cutting out, directing, and doing it so cheerily it put spirit into the others.

It was a time of retrenchment even with the rich; dresses were made to last longer than heretofore, and they had to sit closely at work to make it pay; though Muriel had soon a good and fashionable connexion.

As may be supposed, their many admirers had vanished with their altered position, and Marion grumbled unceasingly. "If you are content to be an old maid, I'm not," she said snappily to Muriel; who simply answered, "Old maids have their uses; they are

happier than unloved wives; and God's will is not our will."

But Marion was not destined to be an old maid, or Anna either, and if Muriel would have listened to Joe Bent she need not long have been a spinster. He entreated her to let him save her from the task she had undertaken. She only shook her head and said, "Nay, Joe, you are a good fellow, but marriage is not for me."

One of Marion's many admirers, a fine stalwart young trader named Wilson, who had just begun business for himself, and who poured forth his devotion in verse (often on the window-panes, whilst she was long at her looking-glass), still remained true to his first love. She had shown him little favour in the days when richer flutterers abounded; but his constancy had touched her heart, he was accepted, and their early marriage was looked for, and the house furnished, when a discovery was made which took them all by surprise, and made John D'Anyer furious.

Anna had been for some months *married to one of her father's fustian cutters!* a man of no family, who was self-taught, and though a fustian cutter could make five guineas a week when trade was brisk, at the time the secret came out he could scarcely obtain a piece of fustian for his frame and long cutting-knife.

It turned out that Anna had gone on an errand to a mercer's, and whilst Muriel was waiting for the trimmings she had been sent to match, she had met the young man Grosmith at the Old Church, and had come back—a married woman, as if nothing had delayed her but a dilatory shopkeeper.

Surely John D'Anyer might have remembered his own marriage, and been lenient; but no, he was prouder, if possible, since his fall than before.

"Does the low-born vagabond think we have sunk down to *his level!*" he exclaimed with an oath, and taking his favourite child by the shoulders he turned her out of the house, saying, "Your place is no longer at

a gentleman's table; be off to your fustian-cutting connections. I disown you," and no intercession of either his wife or Muriel could soften him.

Out of doors the fallen manufacturer was twitted with "the great match his lovely daughter had made," or as time went on told in a different spirit that she and her husband and new-born babe were on the verge of starvation. And they might have starved had it not been for Muriel, and her willing co-operator, Joe Bent, who between them found a post for Anna's husband, humble enough but open to promotion. But neither he nor Anna might tread the Portland Street floors, so long as John D'Anyer had his abode there.

This blow from his favourite daughter's hand made the sensitive and proud man more irritable and imperious than ever, and to hide his poverty, as he thought, he became more lavish in his expenditure abroad, more exacting in his requirements at home, as if oblivious of the strain on Muriel's energies to supply his many wants. When other men of

greater means would call for a glass of ale, he would fling down his money for a bottle of wine, and cry "Tchut, be d—d, do you think I can't pay for it! I'm a gentleman. I don't drink ale."

He had a haughty belief in his own independence, having condescended to travel occasionally with samples for a brother-in-law, though he spent all and more than his commission, and was far from certain in his movements.

He had left home one morning on this business with horse and gig, and was not expected back for three or four days. The family went to bed earlier in consequence.

About one or two in the morning, Mrs. D'Anyer was startled out of sleep by a loud and prolonged ran-tan-tan at the street-door.

Under the impression that it was her impatient husband who had been drinking all the day instead of leaving the town, as he was apt to do, she sprang from the bed hastily lest he should knock again and awake

the weary girls, and in the dark and her haste caught her foot in the bed-clothes, and fell with violence against the old oak coffer—her mother's first wedding-gift.

There she lay half insensible, and numb with cold, unable to extricate herself; and was not found until Muriel brought her a cup of tea at seven o'clock the next morning, as was her wont.

A distracted cry for help ran through the house; as Muriel's trembling fingers in vain essayed to release and raise her. Sara rushed up the stairs, and Betty, no longer young, after her.

With some difficulty, the slightest movement being followed by a moan, the dearly loved mother was extricated from the entangling mass of blankets and coverlet, and laid upon the bed she was never to leave again in life.

She had broken her collar-bone and otherwise injured herself; and though Dr. Percival was called to her aid, and she was waited on and watched with the tenderest

affection, night and day, by Muriel and Sara, with such assistance as married Marion could render, she died in a few weeks, the victim of a senseless and mischievous frolic, mourned by her husband and by her children, Muriel most of all, not alone for the patient and exemplary life which was so abruptly closed, but for the loving touch of sympathy, of kindred thought and principle which had knit so closely the bond of union and affection between the mother and her eldest born. Her death seemed to re-open and deepen the wound made in Muriel's sensitive heart when Arthur Wynne was lost. But she was not demonstrative, never exposed the wound, what she felt was only shown in her greater tenderness for others; and it was her lot to act—not dream.

It was conjectured that some thoughtless booby with that in his head, which was not brains, must have plied the knocker for the amusement of other drunken jolterheads heedless of consequences. Her husband had gone about his business steadily enough for

once, and he vowed vengeance against the roysterers when he came home, but they were never found, and ere long he himself had another paralytic attack which left him helpless on his good daughter's hands.

Full indeed were they then, and full indeed was her heart, but she sought help and strength from on High, and worked on bravely and cheerfully.

Her father was not merely helpless, having lost the entire use of one side, but querulous, fretful, and exacting, taxing the patience of the "born nurse" to the uttermost. He had always been dainty with his diet, but along with this seizure was developed an enormous appetite, amounting to inordinate gluttony, —save that gluttony is rarely nice or particular; and his old sensitiveness regarding his claim to gentility became almost a mania.

Muriel was careful as she could be not to wound his susceptibilities; by rising early and retiring late she contrived that his garments should be speckless, his shirt, frill,

and ruffles of the finest lawn and purest colour; his pipe and tobacco-box always filled and ready by his side; and whatever business was on hand, either she or Betty would lend him a shoulder for an airing in the adjacent Infirmary gardens whenever there was a glimpse of sun.

Now and then he came back indignant that some old acquaintance had passed him by unnoticed. "The upstarts! the mushrooms!" he would cry, "to pass a gentleman without so much as a touch of the hand or the raising of a hat." And then, woe betide dinner and crockery if it were served with the slightest flaw in its faultless appointment. Up would go his stronger foot, and over would go the tripod table on which he had his meals; and amid the smash of glass and earthenware, the clatter of spoons and cutlery, the attempt to rescue the bird or joint prepared for his exclusive consumption, he would rave, then cry like a child that "even his own flesh and blood had ceased to treat him as a gentleman."

He had another cry, and as the years went by this became the more frequent and the more painful. He would individually demolish a joint and a pudding at a meal, yet never sated, he insisted he was being starved, "should die of starvation."

Now and again there were gleams of the better man, and then Muriel was "an angel," "the best daughter a man ever had," and the words made music in her heart and in her life.

One day in the autumn of 1804 (when the brief and delusive peace won by the treaty of Amiens was at an end, and war was again rampant, with all its horrors and its deprivations, and Portland Place was the gay parade ground of volunteers and regulars) the old gentleman had been especially trying because the downpour of rain had prevented him from witnessing the soldiers exercising, according to his daily practice. Nothing had been right, he had upset his dinner because it was not flavoured to his mind. His supper of steak and ale was "not

enough to sustain a fly, much less a gentleman," and then had come the pathetic cry, "I shall die of starvation," when a knock, was heard at the front door, and presently Muriel was told that a lady with a little girl was in the show-room waiting to see her.

It was a late and unusual hour for a customer, but she looked for no other, when after a soothing word to her father, and a little dabbing adjustment of her own hair and attire, she walked into the show-room, now cleared for the night.

Imagine her surprise when Milly Stott, nervously pacing the dimly-lighted apartment, fell at her feet and clasped her knees, sobbing out, "Oh, Muriel, Muriel, take pity on me, and find us shelter here."

"Shelter, Mary dear, shelter; surely! But what brings you here, and why should you implore shelter so strangely? What has happened?" and as she spoke she kissed the tear-stained face, and raised her cousin in loving wonderment.

"Ah! Muriel dear, I have run away from home, and brought my child with me.—I was desperate and hardly knew what I did.—We have travelled all day in the rain.—My father would shut his door in my face if I went there; but you will not turn us out, will you, Muriel?" she said in broken gasps, adding, "This is my little girl, another Milly."

Turn them out! It did not look like it. She already had her arms round the five-year-old girl and was giving her the kiss of welcome, when she realized that they were drenched and weary. Whatever was wrong —and she saw that something uncommon must have occurred—that was not the time for questioning.

With the little one by the hand she led the way to the back sitting-room where she had left her father seated in his high-backed easy chair, lamenting his lot by the fireside.

As they entered, Muriel carrying a candle in her hand, he caught a glimpse of the child and a female form in the shadow behind.

He called out, showing what was uppermost in his mind:

"I tell thee, Muriel, I'll not have Anna or any of her unnatural brood here. Keep them away."

"It is not Anna, it is Milly Stott," put forth Muriel, "and this is her pretty little girl."

"Milly Stott," echoed Mr. D'Anyer, "then where is John Stott? He could come and see me when I had goods to be carried, like the rest of the mercenaries; hang him! why does he hold back now?"

"He is—I left him at home in Halifax," faltered Milly much disconcerted. Then Muriel, who had been taking off the child's hat and cloak, interposed to prevent further question with her own unwonted bustle about the change of wet garments, the preparations for a warm supper, sleeping arrangements and so forth, in the midst of which he fell into a doze.

She had said nothing to either Sara or Betty of the reasons for this unexpected visit,

and it was not until her paralyzed father had been settled comfortably for the night, and the bewildered child was also cosily tucked up in bed, that she troubled Milly for an explanation.

Glad enough was Milly to relieve her own feelings, and amid showers of tears to tell the story of her marriage seven years before, and the miserable life of restraint she had led with a man of uncongenial years and habits.

"You know, Muriel," she said, looking into the fire, "I should never have consented to marry him, even though father threatened to turn me out to starve, if I had not been told that Bob had married Ann Barber and gone to live in state at the Hall. Then I was reckless and did not care what became of me. Father was always preaching that I had better be an old man's darling than a young one's cast away; and I was mad enough to try it. I have never had a day's happiness since," she sobbed out.

"Poor Milly," cried Muriel, "my heart ached for you when I heard. It was hard

for a high-spirited girl to be tied for life to a man she did not care for. But did you strive to conquer your dislike and do your duty as you vowed at the altar? I hoped that esteem might come with years, and smooth your way."

"I tried it, Muriel. I have your kind and sensible letter still; and many a time I have read it when I needed counsel and solace. And I tried to take your advice, and be a good wife; but I found it was of no use, and I gave up."

"How was that? Was he not kind to you?" and Muriel gently stroked the soft hand lying within hers.

"Well—a—at first he was kind enough, and I suppose was fond of me; but he seemed afraid to let me out of his sight, or to go anywhere without him; but I did not care to have him with me wherever I went, I was none so fond of him; and I was not accustomed to a gaoler;" and here some of the old fire burst forth.

"My dear," said Muriel thoughtfully, "I

hope you did not wilfully run counter to his wishes. He might feel that it was not safe for his young and handsome wife to go abroad without a protector."

"I did not want *his* protection!" sobbed out Milly, "and I told him so."

"Oh, Milly, Milly, how could you? What a blow it would be to his trust and affection! A wife should be proud of her husband's protection."

"Well, I was not proud of *him*. And after that he took to watching me like a cat watching a mouse, the jealous old miser."

"Jealous, and a miser! Ah, Milly dear, this must be some of your old romance, and exaggeration. He cannot be a miser. It was only last year, when the war broke out again, that I heard he offered not only a large number of horses and waggons to the goverment, but to pay the drivers himself; so there is no knowing whether he or the Pickfords were the most generous and patriotic. You must know this. Joe Bent told me."

"Oh, yes, I know. I heard all about *that*, but he kept *me* short enough. However, it was not for that I ran away. It was because —because he was so monstrously suspicious and jealous, and he—beat me."

"Beat you?" echoed Muriel, "beat you? Was he so cruel and violent? and without cause?"

"He had no cause but his own fancy. You know his nephew lived with us, and kept his books, and if I only spoke with Richard, or smiled across the table at him, Stott got in a rage. The second time he beat me Richard Norton took the whip out of his hands and broke it over his own shoulders. And then he turned his nephew out—and I was afraid, and ran away here."

Muriel looked grave. She knew of old how Milly's vivid imagination coloured all she said or thought; but here was something more than romance run riot. The matter was too serious to be dealt with lightly.

"My dear Milly," she said, "when you took the yoke of matrimony upon your

shoulders (most unequal in your case), it needed all care to adjust it so that it should not chafe your shoulders. With care and Divine help your burden would have lightened day by day. I fear somehow Mr. Stott is not the only one to blame. He was not a young man when you married him. I suppose the nephew is younger. I hope you never laughed and talked with Mr. Norton with the intent to annoy your husband?"

Milly hung her head. Muriel had an uncomfortable way of reducing loose impressions to hard fact. "I might have done so sometimes, and if so he deserved it," she mumbled out, not half so proud of herself as she had been. And then again she burst into tears, half drowning her pitiful protest, "I would not have done it if he had been reasonable, and not suspicious."

This was a painful revelation to Muriel. Here was a matter not to be dealt with lightly or hastily.

Not for one moment did she suspect Milly of aught but petulant wilfulness; but her

flight had widened a breach that should never have been made, and might never be healed.

She lay awake that night (when Milly slept by her child restfully), endeavouring to solve an unsolvable problem—the problem of reconciliation, and the rebuilding of the house of marriage on a surer basis. Yet how was she to accomplish this? Or ought she to attempt it, if John Stott was brutal and inhuman? Could Milly have goaded him to strike her.

At all events Milly was safe with her for the present. Would John Stott demand the return of his wife and child? If so, would she not be powerless to retain them?

"Milly," said she in the morning, when the little one was gone to chat with the old gentleman downstairs, "Does not your husband love his child?"

"Love her! She is the very apple of his eye? I taught him a lesson when I brought her away?" and Milly looked exultant.

"I think you have a lesson to learn, Milly

Stott, and your child may teach it you before you go back. I heard her crying for her father this morning."

Mrs. Stott looked foolish, then defiant. "What if she did? and I am not going back. Not even if you turn us adrift."

"I am not likely to do *that*, but I cannot shut my eyes to the great trouble you have brought, not only on your own head, but on that of your sweet little one, and on your husband's, by your rash precipitancy. You should have been patient, and have borne with your husband for the sake of your child."

"Ah, it's all very well for you to preach patience, that never had any troubles like mine; first Robert was torn——"

Something in Muriel's face arrested her.

"Oh, Muriel, my dear, good, patient Muriel, how could I be so thoughtless as to say *that*. I would not have wounded you *so* for the world." And she threw her arms around her cousin in her penitence.

A wan smile broke on Muriel's lips.—"Yet you would wound your husband by robbing

him of his child! You have wounded him on your own showing by hasty speech; made light of him to the nephew he had reared. Think of it, Milly. Is not the old husband likely to feel a taunt or sneer as acutely as a young one? You can feel for me, feel also for him, and endeavour to forget his years. Think of it well, and pray for strength and wisdom to guide you."

Some weeks went by, weeks in which Muriel's patient endurance of her father's vagaries was not lost upon Milly; weeks in which Muriel saw with satisfaction how close a friendship had grown up between the invalid and the little girl, who was always ready to pick up his handkerchief, or give him his pipe, and to listen to his wonderful tales of fairies and genii. She taught the child to call him "Grandpa," and though at first he winced, he never forbade it.

She had not been idle. She had gone to her Uncle Hargreaves, and urged upon him the necessity to ascertain the facts of the case; and how far a reconciliation was

possible, or desirable. She wrote to Mr. Stott to let him know that Milly and the child were with her. As she expected, a demand came for the restoration of the child, and the mother refused to give it up.

On their mutual love for that child Muriel contrived little by little to build up an edifice not merely of reconciliation, but of future trust and forbearance, and when Mr. Stott came at the end of October to fetch his wife and child, a very different Milly went back to him, to find a different husband, a happier home. She went back to make the best of things and not the worst. And the grip of John Stott's hard hand at parting, told Muriel more than his rough words of thanks, how grateful he was to her.

With the little child a light seemed to have gone out of the house; and no one missed it more than John D'Anyer. He was heard to wish Marion's lad was as big as little Milly; he missed his young companion.

"Anna has a girl nearly as old," dropped

Muriel adroitly. But no word said her father.

The next day, a girl's winter frock was being nicely made upstairs; and a bonnet.

On the Sunday, Muriel came home from church with a little girl by the hand. "I've brought you another little handmaiden," said she, taking off the child's cloak and bonnet as she spoke. A new dark blue frock set off the child's fair hair and skin.

Her father gave a start, and his face twitched. She was afraid of her own experiment.

John D'Anyer turned his eyes from the child to Muriel, and back again, with never a word.

There was a painful pause, the child seemed half afraid and clung to Muriel's hand.

"What is your name, child?" he asked huskily.

"Nelly, grandfather."

"Do you know whose name it was first, my lass?"

"It was grandmother's."

"It was an angel's name, lass, an angel's name—aye an angel unrecognized until she took wing," he murmured to himself, adding, "Come hither, Nelly, you are not afraid of me."

"Oh, no, I am never afraid of a gentleman."

Nelly had unconsciously played on his weakness. She had involuntarily recognized his superiority to common men.

Muriel left them together. When she returned he was smoothing down the flaxen curls of his grandchild, and telling her how much she resembled her own mother.

Muriel knew then that reconciliation with Anna was not far in the future. The child went and came.

In a few weeks he asked, "Haven't we a house empty, we could let Anna and her husband have for a while rent free?"

Muriel was only too glad to say "yes." The loss of the rent was as nothing to the healing of strife, the restoration of her sister to her father's heart, and to something more of comfort and respectability. Hitherto she had

only been able to see her or serve her by stealth. It was a bright day for her when Anna Grosmith and her husband sat down at their tea-table, and no special solecism in good manners offended the old gentleman's fastidious eye.

On a bright spring morning about two months after this, when the birds were twittering among the Infirmary-garden trees, Muriel was called to the door to see a customer in a sedan-chair, an old lady in deep mourning, who could not alight.

To her amazement she was accosted in the voice of Mrs. Wynne; but she would never have recognized the bygone beauty in the toothless, hollow-jawed, sunken-eyed woman before her.

Nor would she have recognized the haughty mother of her lost love in her address or her errand.

She had come to crave Muriel's forgiveness, she said; to ask her, for the love she had borne her shipwrecked son, to come and be to her a daughter.

Sir Madoc was dead. Lady Jenkinson ruled at the Plas. Owen had married Norris and deserted her years before. She was a poor, forlorn, childless widow, and she sought Muriel's forgiveness and pity. In her loneliness she had turned to Muriel. She offered to leave her all she possessed if she would but be as a daughter to her.

Forgiveness and pity were ever in Muriel's gift; but she could only answer the lady that she had a nearer and higher duty to perform, in ministering to her own stricken father, watching over and guarding her younger sister.

Mrs. Wynne would scarcely be gainsaid; but she was forced to admit that Muriel was in the right, and retired, though reluctantly, to her solitary apartments in Lever Street. But Muriel did not leave her wholly alone, and she saw she was not neglected.

All her past unkindness was forgotten in the more potent fact that she was Arthur's mother, alone and helpless. Poor in all save coin.

John D'Anyer was not so placable. The sedan-chair came frequently to their door. He would on no account visit the lady who had presumed to flout and scorn *his* daughter.

Another and another year went by, years in which Muriel often laughingly declared she thought she "had better drop the dress-making and set up as a professional nurse," so many were the night and day demands on her good-nature and acknowledged value in the sick-room. "Send for Muriel," said her aunts when illness invaded a household.

"Go for Aunt Muriel!" was the cry of her sisters when the olive branch put forth a fresh leaf. "Send for Muriel," was the first thought when the shadows of death or disaster were closing in.

The former were closing in on John D'Anyer. He had prophesied his own end as clearly as did Robert Nixon the Cheshire prophet. His fell disorder gripped him by the throat. His inordinate appetite remained; all power to swallow food was gone. It was impossible to sustain life or to nourish him,

and to Muriel's intense grief, for she had loved him better in his helplessness than in his manliness, he did absolutely die of starvation.

He was laid by the side of his wife, and then Muriel and Sara were alone; and Sara with her lovely complexion and flaxen hair was pruning her wings for flight.

The year of mourning was at an end; and Mrs. Wynne who had gone out with it, had been as good as her word. Muriel was rich, richer than John Stott's rich widow, for she had little but what she owned as the custodian of his richer daughter.

Wedding garments were in preparation for two brides: the last that were to be fashioned under Muriel's direction. She was about to turn over her business to an old apprentice. Not that Muriel was contemplating matrimony for herself.

Little nephews and nieces there were to come in and out and be petted by Aunt Muriel, but even Joe Bent had set Aunt Muriel down as a confirmed old maid.

Milly Stott was about to link her fate with

Richard Norton, the carrier's nephew, and her champion when a champion was needed. And lovely Sara was about to wed a Cheshire yeoman of good repute, and wide acres, whose home was to be Muriel's also.

There was laughter and melody in the work-room, needles were flying briskly through satin and lace, and Sara was singing blithely over her work.

If there was a shade of sadness in the room it was deep down in Muriel's heart where thoughts of Arthur Wynne and *her* forbidden bridal would obtrude, and would not be banished. Something like a tear fell on the bodice she was trimming. "God is good," she said to herself, "I must not repine, had we been married I could not have saved his life."

The unpretentious knocker in Portland Street responded to a decided and vigorous hand.

A little damsel opened it.

"Is Miss D'Anyer within?" asked a tall gentleman of the child.

"Miss D'Anyer doesn't live——Oh, you mean Aunt Muriel," recollected the child—Anna's eldest girl, Nelly. "Aunt Muriel, you are wanted!" Miss D'Anyer's very identity was evidently lost in the more familiar appellative. She was "Aunt Muriel" to so many who were not even of kin.

Aunt Muriel composedly descended the stairs; the stranger advanced into the hall.

"Muriel!" said he.

"Arthur!" she screamed, and in another moment she was clasped in his strong embrace, her soft brown eyes looking into his, as she murmured thankfully, "God HAS been good to us. I have trusted Him and He has not failed me. I have waited patiently for the Lord, and He has given me the desire of my heart."

"Aye, my love; my faithful, obedient, patient, unselfish Muriel, I have heard all the story of your goodness, your love and constancy, and there is no one to forbid our marrying *now*."

Joe Bent had been the generous chronicler.

Years after, when he and Muriel had taken possession of the Plas, and little ones clustered round their knees, Sir Arthur Wynne would talk over his miserable campaigns in Holland, and tell them of that terrible tempest in which the *Valk* was driven and beaten about from coast to coast, and the horror of seeing his own dear father separated from him to go down afterwards with the men, and their wives, and little ones; of his struggles to clutch a drifting spar, and secure himself to it by the scarf his dear Muriel had netted. How he owed to that scarf his merciful preservation, and was picked up helpless by the convoy of a Dutch outward-bound East India trader, after drifting many hours, and was, at the end of the voyage, landed on the island of Java; how the capture of Batavia by the British set him free to join the army in India, or return to England. Of his longing for home and Muriel, and his election to return in a homeward-bound East Indiaman; of its attack by a French

cruiser and surrender; of his sufferings as a prisoner of war, first in the horrible hold of the cruiser, and then in the still more horrible prison at Marseilles; of his adventurous escape after long years of privation and suffering; and his unspeakable thankfulness to find, when he landed in England, that Miss D'Anyer had not lost her identity in any name more formidable than "Aunt Muriel." And he never failed to tell of his open-armed welcome, or of the broken sixpence so carefully preserved. But most he loved to dwell on his dear wife's many virtues, the meekness and patience with which she had borne her lot; and he was wont to point to the old silver-clasped Bible as the bulwark of her faith in God, and her shield from the arrows of the world, her mother's best gift.

So too when the war was finally over, and Captain Griffiths came (minus a limb) to the Plas with his wife and sons; and when the Kingsleys found their way thither from their new home. The Forest House had long been untenable, and soon after they abandoned

it, a terrible gale swept it utterly away. But no gale swept away from the hearts of Muriel and Arthur the remembrance of all they had suffered when old heads legislated for young hearts. And when, in course of time, one of Captain Griffiths' sons came wooing to Miss Muriel Wynne, and they fancied she might have made a better match —they thought of their own young days, and there was no *forbidding to marry*. It may be added there was no clandestine courtship.

THE END.